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# KUNAPIPI

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2  
1979

Kunapipi



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# Kunapipi

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VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2

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*Kunapipi* is a continuation of *Commonwealth Newsletter* and is published twice a year, Summer and Winter, by Dangaroo Press, Department of English, University of Aarhus. It is a journal of creative and critical writing concerned with the new literatures written in English. The major concentration is on the present and former Commonwealth countries but this is in no way exclusive. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics will also be included.

The journal is the bulletin for the European branch of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies. As such it offers information about courses, conferences, visiting scholars and writers, scholarships, and literary competitions.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet and should be accompanied by a return envelope.

All correspondence – manuscripts, books for review, inquiries – should be sent to:

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# Editorial

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ANNA RUTHERFORD

The response to the first issue of *Kunapipi* has been overwhelming. We have managed in the space of six months to increase our subscription list by over one hundred members and every post brings new subscribers. This is of course gratifying and necessary if we are to continue. But even more gratifying have been the letters of congratulation and appreciation from all over the world – some from our friends (those we expect!), but others from complete strangers. When one works hard over a venture, it is a good feeling to know that it has been worth while.

Perhaps most exciting of all has been the response on the part of the creative writers, both the established and the yet to be established. *Kunapipi* aims to fulfil the requirements T. S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. The first issue introduced two young Malawian poets, Jack Mapanje and Felix Mnthali (we must apologise to Felix Mnthali for mis-spelling his name. The error occurred because though the manuscript was typed the name was hand written and we mistook the n for an a). This issue contains an article on these poets and introduces the work of several other young poets from Malawi. Also included are three stories entered in the EACLALS short story competition, including the winning story, Mark O'Connor's 'The Black Cabaret'. In this way we hope to promote new talent whilst in no way ignoring the already established.

It was with deep regret that we learnt in May of the death of Jean Rhys. We feel very fortunate in being able to print what is

possibly the last interview Ms Rhys gave as well as a tribute from a personal friend of the novelist, Phyllis Shand Allfrey. This issue of *Kanapipi* is dedicated to Jean Rhys.

In this issue we give you a forerunner of what is to be a regular feature of each Spring issue, *The Year that Was*. This will provide readers with a summary of the major publications in each of the countries.

We would like to thank all the people for their encouragement and efforts in promoting *Kanapipi*.

We would also like to thank all the people who have sent in both creative and critical contributions and hope they will continue to do so.

A final thank you must go to Det humanistiske Forskningsråd (the Danish Humanities Research Council) for their generous support.

ELAINE CAMPBELL

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## From Dominica to Devonshire A Memento of Jean Rhys

What I'm working on now is an autobiography of my childhood in Dominica. But it's a long slow job and I do get so tired. I only hope I can finish it. I'm very old now.

*Jean Rhys, London Sunday Times, 25 February 1973.*

Mr Severn, the journalist in Jean Rhys' title story 'Tigers Are

Better-Looking', is exhorted to write 'a swell article' for his weekly feature in an Australian paper. But Mr Severn is upset over the goodbye letter he has just received from his very dear friend Hans and he can't get the swing of it. 'The swing's the thing, as everybody knows – otherwise the cadence of the sentence'. If he can once get into it, 'he could go ahead like an old horse trotting'. The loss of a very dear friend can make writing difficult, especially if the article is about the friend and the loss is permanent. Hans and Mr Severn were not old friends; Mr Severn had extended the hospitality of his flat after Hans had shown up in London with a broken leg. The friendship had evidently mushroomed quickly and ended abruptly. Hans had had enough. 'Good-bye. I'll write you again when times are better'.

The last letter I have from Jean Rhys is dated March third and it reads, 'Unfortunately I have been ill — cracked up a bit, to tell you the truth — and have just-got back from a nursing home. I hope to be well enough to get to London in two or three weeks and it goes without saying will do all I can for the book'. I don't know yet whether Jean Rhys managed to get to London sometime in April, but she died in the hospital in Exeter, the city near her village in Devonshire, on May fourteenth. Her reference to the book and the letter itself grew out of a relationship which started by mail last summer and which eventuated in my visiting Miss Rhys in Cheriton Fitzpaine.

An accumulation of coincidence lies behind the visit: a doctoral dissertation on British West Indian fiction is one feature. More important to Miss Rhys was the fact that I'd visited her home island in the summer of 1977 and while there had been introduced to Miss Rhys' friend, Phyllis Shand Allfrey. When a colleague in London invited me for a visit, I wrote to Jean Rhys to say that while in England I would like to bring her news of Dominica but her *Harpers* essay 'Making Bricks without Straw' had convinced me that she was quite fed up with interviewers and visitors. In what was the beginning of an epistolary friendship, she wrote back: 'I didn't mean to be intimidating when I wrote "Bricks

without Straw". I'm the intimidated one, I think! And as she was 'very busy trying to finish my autobiography' she said that she'd like to see me, preferably in late September. By that time she hoped to have finished the Dominican memoirs and would be at leisure to indulge in a lengthy chat about places and things cherished since childhood. After negotiations with the literary agent in London and arrangements with the friend in Holland Park, the visit was settled. But I failed to get to the Boston airport in time for my scheduled flight and the visit had to be set up again, this time for October. The additional weeks allowed Miss Rhys to complete the memoirs so that it was my privilege to spend the afternoon with her at her bungalow in Devon the day following the typist's final visit. Miss Rhys, her nurse and I quietly celebrated by exchanging views on Dominica, the Windward Island home where Jean Rhys was born.

Our conversation centered somewhat unsatisfactorily upon an effort to make comparisons between the turn-of-the-century West Indian island that Miss Rhys has endeavoured to reconstruct in her first section of the autobiography and my own perceptions of Dominican and British West Indian life derived from thirteen years in the British Virgin Islands and a summer's visit to Dominica. The awkward aspect of the conversation quickly emerged. Our differing perceptions were not truly comparable. The discrepancy was not so much the result of recent changes as of changes wrought upon the island economy between the time of Miss Rhys' childhood there and the time of her return visit with her brother in 1938. The commercial developments that occurred between 1910 and 1938 (wide-spread banana cultivation, the introduction of the lime growing industry under the aegis of L. Rose Co., Ltd., as examples) were great enough to convince Miss Rhys that the island had changed irrevocably. My impression, however, is that the island has altered little relative to the rate-of-change discernible in neighbouring Leeward and Windward Islands, and that the Dominica of 1938, which Miss Rhys last saw (she never returned afterwards), and the pre-independence island

of my own experience are very similar. We concluded that the greatest physical difference effected in the forty years between our two visits is the completion of a road system that both transverses and almost circumscribes the island. Roads and road-building are subjects of eternal fascination for Dominicans, and Miss Rhys had just completed a piece entitled 'The Imperial Road' in which she describes an early attempt to build a modern, hard-surfaced highway across the island's interior. The piece will be included in the Dominican memoirs which are scheduled for publication in the fall of 1979.

Miss Bridger, a young woman who joined Miss Rhys about five years ago after a half-decade of nursing service among the Eskimos, hastened to caution my enthusiastic response to the completion of the memoir: 'You realize, of course, that this is only the first volume of the memoirs, the section dealing with Jean's early years in Dominica'. Janet continued with the information that Miss Rhys had completed large segments of the second volume of the memoirs – the section dealing with Miss Rhys' years as an expatriate in Paris. Miss Rhys feared that not many people will be interested in the first section of her memoirs, but that the second, the 'racy' section, would attract wide interest. It was to cover the twenties and thirties when Rhys published her short story collection, *The Left Bank*, and her novels *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, *Voyage in the Dark*, *Good Morning*, *Midnight* and *Quartet*, the fictionalization of Jean Rhys' liaison with Ford Madox Ford in a ménage à trois. *Quartet* includes a sketch of Ernest Hemingway's attempt to advise her about her relationship with Ford and a critique of the posturings of the bohemian set in Montparnasse. The second volume would have been especially useful for women's studies as it would reflect a female writer's view of the expatriate colony in Paris during a period that has been documented widely for the exploits of Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, and Ford Madox Ford.

The 'underground years' – the years between the publication of *Good Morning*, *Midnight* in 1939 and the appearance of *Wide Sar-*

*garro Sea* in 1966 – logically comprise the matter of a third volume of biography. These include the years of the second world war – the event that has been blamed for thrusting Rhys' writing out of public consciousness. It is during this period that Miss Rhys' daughter from her first marriage disappeared in Nazi Europe. (Maryvonne now lives in Holland and she visited her mother two or three times a year, according to Miss Bridger.) Curiously little attention has been awarded Jean Rhys as a wife, a daughter, a mother, or, for that matter, as a grandmother. But motherhood is certainly a significant element in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, and both these novels need a second reading for their picture of the Rhysian heroine as daughter. There exists an almost stereotypic interpretation of the Rhysian heroine as the bruised demimondaine whose emotional life never extends beyond a self-absorbed contemplation of the requirements for survival in an alien environment. If the third volume of the memoirs had been completed, we would have been enriched by a very different angle of vision regarding both the writer and her autobiographical heroine.

Since Tillie Olsen has opened up the realities of long-term silences on the part of preoccupied women writers, it is easier to understand the day-by-day distractions to creativity involved in nurturing a marital relationship, especially during a period of national distress. The difficulty of creativity for a perfectionist writer like Miss Rhys is illustrated by the painstaking manner in which *Wide Sargasso Sea* was written. Diana Athill, the director of the British publishing firm André Deutsch, explains what happened in the seven years between the time she received news of *Wide Sargasso Sea's* inception and Miss Rhys' announcement that it was almost finished.

She is a slow and perfectionist writer, anyway, who produces lucidity out of an almost incredible mass of tangled notes and drafts, all written on assorted scraps of paper in a hand suggesting that spiders have danced in ink, which only she can interpret; machines conspire against her, so that she can't use one for dictating; and in addition her circumstances were very difficult, her

husband was ill, her own health was not strong, and there was no secretarial help available in her neighbourhood. Sometimes it seemed that the book would never reach us, but always, just as we despaired, she would report that she was struggling on. And in 1964, seven years after our first news of the book, she announced that only a few sentences needed typing and that she would bring it to London, do the finishing touches there, and hand it over.

(*Bookletter*, 20 August 1966)

The champagne luncheon that Diana Athill planned for celebrating the completion of *Wide Sargasso Sea* was not to be. When she telephoned Miss Rhys' hotel on the morning of the luncheon she was told, 'please come at once, the lady is ill'. Instead of taking Jean Rhys to luncheon, Diana Athill took her to the hospital where Rhys remained for months. 'The book was so nearly finished – only a matter of a few sentences – and was so very good that I suggested we should publish it as it was. This Miss Rhys would not have, and I had to promise that it would not appear until she was satisfied with it.' It was two more years before those few sentences would be finished and the novel was to meet Jean Rhys' satisfaction.

This account of how Jean Rhys' masterpiece was written makes it easier to understand why the memoirs have taken so long to complete. If they exhibit the same prose clarity and unimpeachable integrity as *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the early novels, and the Rhysian short stories collected in *Tigers Are Better-Looking* and *Sleep It Off, Lady*, they will be worth the wait. Miss Rhys explained to me that the Dominican section had given her particular difficulty because she had to go so far back into her memory to reconstruct the events of her childhood. She volunteered that she had reached the phase of life when one returns naturally to memories of childhood, but she immediately isolated the necessity of avoiding sentimentality. In her most emphatic statement of the afternoon she said, 'It is so important not to be sentimental'.

The writing conditions that Miss Athill cites for *Wide Sargasso*

She apply with minor modifications to the memoirs. Rhys continued to work without machinery. Not only did she not use a dictating machine, she never learnt to typewrite her material for publication. And when her hand began to shake so seriously, the handwriting to which Miss Athill refers was no longer available as a means for communicating thought to paper. Instead, Miss Rhys spoke her sentences to Janet Bridger who typed them, in a somewhat unpolished manner as she is not a typist by profession, and returned them to Miss Rhys for correction and revision. The revisions were numerous and Janet offers the example of a poem by Miss Rhys that had to be typed and re-typed countless times. In the case of the memoirs, after the corrections and revisions were finalized, a professional typist came to Miss Rhys' bungalow two or three afternoons a week in order to type the final copy to be sent on to the publisher. As Miss Rhys did finish the final copy of the text for the Dominican memoir, it will not be many months before we learn the details of a childhood spent so long ago on the most beautiful of all Caribbean islands.

Dominica never claimed the attention of the Western world to the same extent as the larger and more densely-populated British West Indian islands of Trinidad, Jamaica, Antigua and Barbados. Neither has it commanded the interest of the purveyors of tourism – perhaps because it does not feature long, white sand beaches or an English-speaking population. The natural reticence of Dominicans as well as their French patois speech are factors that help to preserve the densely-forested island from invasion by sight-seers just as the Carib Indians once preserved it from exploitation by the sugar planters who so efficiently deforested other West Indian islands. The island's isolation has attracted writers seeking peacefulness and it has encouraged native-born writers; as a result, several fine novelists have emerged from Dominica in the twentieth century.

My conversation with Miss Rhys next centred about her friendship with a creole writer who lives near Roseau, the town where Jean Rhys was born and the capital of the island. Phyllis Shand



Allfrey, whose Dominican ancestry dates from the earliest days of West Indian colonisation, wrote a first-rate novel entitled *The Orchid House*. It was published in British, American and French editions in the nineteen-fifties. All these editions have gone out of print, and although Mrs Allfrey's novel is always cited in bibliographies of West Indian literature, there are few literary commentators who have actually read it – primarily because it is unavailable. Phyllis Allfrey has also published two volumes of poetry, but her greatest contribution to Dominican life has been through her political activities. She organized the island's first labour union and she was Dominica's elected representative during the West Indian Federation. For many years she and her husband have written and printed Dominica's opposition newspaper, *The Star*, and she has mailed this newspaper faithfully to Jean Rhys in England. Sometimes she tucked into the pages of the newspaper a personal note that might not otherwise have reached its intended destination in Devonshire.

*The Star*, with its bits of island news, its recapitulation of local sport events, its commentary (often fiercely critical) on island politics, and its birth, death and marriage records helped to keep fresh in Miss Rhys' mind the singular ambience of Dominican life. Janet brought out a copy of *The Star* for the three of us to refer to, and looking at the newspaper, Jean Rhys said she felt that she 'owes Phyllis something' since Mrs Allfrey had sent her the newspaper for such a long time. Miss Rhys asked me what I thought she might do in appreciation and whether I thought it wise to send money through the postal service to Dominica. Recalling that Mrs Allfrey had requested me to assist her in bringing *The Orchid House* back into print, I suggested that Miss Rhys might consider writing a preface or an introduction for a possible new edition of Mrs Allfrey's novel. Miss Rhys was enthusiastic about helping with the project and agreed to take a copy of *The Orchid House* to London for a reading by Miss Athill. For my part, I felt that if Jean Rhys did write a laudatory essay that resulted in the reintroduction of Phyllis Allfrey's fine West Indian novel, my visit

to the bungalow down the hedgerows of Devon would be rewarded.

Our conversation passed easily from one Dominican topic to another, although my attempts to extract biographical information were in vain. Miss Rhys always skilfully brought the conversation back to Dominica. When I enquired how many years she had lived in Devon, she responded vaguely, 'Many, many years'. When I asked her how long she had lived in Cornwall before moving to Devon, she answered, 'For a long, long time'. The only concrete answers I received to biographical questions were that Miss Rhys had no relatives left in Dominica and that her mother had followed Jean Rhys to England and had died there. Miss Rhys' sister died a year or so ago in England and Miss Rhys commented, 'There is no one left'. This, of course, excludes her daughter and her daughter's family. With respect to her personal life, Miss Rhys was truly as Marcelle Bernstein described her in 1969 – 'inscrutable'. She may have been saving the details of her personal life for revelation in her memoirs or she may have been planning to remain enigmatic. Doubtlessly, much detail has been lost because of her reserve. Her desire to control information about her private life is exemplified by her recent sweeping destruction of old love letters. And although such destruction of primary biographical material may scar the souls of literary biographers, it is the privilege of an artist to make every effort to preserve his or her privacy.

There are obvious privileges and benefits that result from the adulation of a world-wide readership. Miss Rhys, who lived for a long time in penurious circumstances, was only in recent years able to take an occasional trip abroad as she did to Venice during a chill English winter. Her bungalow, that has been described frequently as lacking both a telephone and television, now possesses a television aerial and set as well as the telephone upon which I spoke to her from Cerne Abbas. Her sitting room contains tributes from friends and literati and upon its wall hangs the large and beautiful painting executed for the dustjacket of *Wide Sargasso*

Sea's hardcover edition. A new, rather elegant piece of furniture had been introduced. Although Janet refers to it as 'a disaster', the plush chaise longue upon which Miss Rhys reclined during an interview eliminated the problem referred to in 'Making Bricks without Straw'. In that essay she explains some of the problems associated with interviews: how frequently her remarks are misinterpreted; how rudely the interviewer pounces into the chair that Miss Rhys has reserved for herself because it faces the light that most flatters her. After reading 'Making Bricks without Straw', one of my daughters expressed concern for Miss Rhys' discomfiture and asked that I write to reassure her that when I came to visit, I would permit Miss Rhys to sit down first. Miss Rhys graciously wrote back, 'I'll be very pleased if you can come and please tell your Becky that I didn't mean to be taken quite so seriously. I've got a chaise longue now and I recline on it, uncomfortable but regal'.

While the perquisites of literary success are readily apparent, the disadvantages are more subtly hidden. They are, however, no less affective upon an artist's life. This is especially so in the case of an artist with a temperament like Miss Rhys'. If the cliché of the 'private person' had not already been so lavishly applied to entertainment celebrities whose 'privateness' is nothing more than an elaborate pose, it would be tempting to assign that epithet to Gwen Williams, known to the world as Jean Rhys. In the first letter of our correspondence, she defined herself as both shy and intimidated. Although her purpose in so doing was to assist me out of my reservations about visiting her, the self-description is sound. Her interviewers, photographers and would-be biographers have not often avoided offending a sensitive temperament and she and Janet regaled me with stories of arrogance and inconsideration during visits to which Miss Rhys had acquiesced. I was told about the internationally-known photographer who enterprisingly brought a tape recorder with him. The tale of the interviewer who cornered Miss Rhys having her hair shampooed in Crediton is well-known. One American interviewer was permitted

to take several photographs at the time of her visit and subsequently selected for publication the one that most distressed Miss Rhys. And the commercial photographs taken for the latest dust-jacket resulted in the selection, apparently over the wishes of Miss Rhys, of the now widely-published picture of Miss Rhys wearing what she called 'that awful hat'.

Prior to my visit, an international telephone call from a reporter for *Paris Match* interrupted the tranquillity of Miss Rhys' plan for the day. The caller demanded to know when Miss Rhys would be able to see her! Some of these importunate approaches could be deferred to the literary agent in London, but so many visitors were received that Miss Rhys' sitting room 'had become like the waiting room of a train station', according to Janet. Some of the visitors arrived late for their interviews and Miss Rhys was kept waiting for their arrival. Janet explained, 'Jean gets herself into a terrible state over these visits'. Marvelling that Miss Rhys continued to tolerate such unpleasant experiences, I asked if the visits ever turned out to be enjoyable. 'Oh no', was the firm rejoinder. It appears that the same passivity that colours the lives of Rhys' heroines caused her to be overwhelmed by bumptious callers, and the consequence of frequent and bold intrusions was her retreat from communicativeness.

The effect of these intrusions is dramatically illustrated by the change in Jean Rhys' attitude since Bernstein's fruitful interview was published in the *London Observer* in 1969. Still excited over her newly recovered literary importance, Rhys awarded Bernstein the most successful interview ever published about her. But Bernstein nevertheless entitled the essay, 'The Inscrutable Miss Jean Rhys'. During the reported conversation in which Jean Rhys provided glimpses of her writing method and personal lifestyle – material she later artistically transmuted into 'My Day' – she expressed the delight she entertained in being sought by the outside world. Complaining about the loneliness of her situation in Devonshire she elaborated, 'I think loneliness is a part of writing', and continued, 'But when week goes after week and you never see anyone

it's really rather trying'. A knock at the front door elicited a different response then. Hurrying to answer the door herself she remarked, 'I expect someone marvellous. I still expect some wonderful stranger. I fly to the door, longing.' Instead of the anticipatory delight in the encounter represented by the stranger on the other side of the door, Jean Rhys learned to evade and hedge. Her companion served as a guardian to the novelist or as a guide to the interviewer, in accordance with how the conversation progressed. For example, upon first meeting me, Janet, unsure of my intentions, inquired, 'What do you want? If you just tell her what you want, it will be much easier'. Startled by the belligerence, I lamely responded, 'I'm not sure that I want anything'. 'Well, tell her that, and you will be alright' were my instructions. I had come to England primarily to pay homage to a literary figure, but I also would have liked answers to some of the four pages of questions that had arisen out of my close readings of Miss Rhys' novels. The strained nature of the greeting led me to leave the typed pages unopened in the copy of *Sleep It Off, Lady* I'd brought to be autographed.

Miss Rhys' desperation over the tactics of her public caused her to adopt a pose that could be mistakenly judged as senility. The pose was easily assumed by the woman who left Dominica at the age of sixteen to study acting in England. It replaced the excuse of illness after that line of defense had been overcome. But any hint of senility was disconcertingly at variance with the precision of both her fiction and her correspondence. Her letters were brief, gently humorous and to the point. For example, she wrote to me in July, 'What you tell me about Dominica interests me very much, of course. Yes, I have considered going back but I'm very much afraid of cockroaches and still keep putting it off!' In another note to me she supplied specific directions for locating her village and identifying her cottage. My recollection of those clear directions which included an unmistakable means of finding her unmarked bungalow stood me in good stead after my arrival in Devonshire.

Miss Rhys' literary agent had written two letters confirming Miss Rhys' desire to see me. The second letter requested that I telephone Miss Rhys at her home after my arrival in England and a day or two in advance of the interview. Complying with this reasonable request, I telephoned the day before I planned to be in Devon. Miss Rhys answered the telephone, failed to recognize my name, pleaded illness, and suggested that I contact her literary agent in London if I wished to arrange an interview. I spent that night in a country hotel in Tiverton upon whose stationery I wrote an appeal. I decided I would deliver to the cottage my letter in conjunction with the present I'd brought from Dominica. The next day I drove to Miss Rhys' village and knocked on the door of the cottage. A sweet voice called through the open window, 'What is it?' I answered, 'I wish to leave a letter and a present', and Miss Rhys' voice replied, 'I don't wish any, thank you'. In distress I called back through the open window that I wasn't selling anything and simply wished to leave two packages on the doorstep. After a short silence the front door opened and Janet Bridger came out. I asked Janet to give my letter to Miss Rhys and to deliver my present. Then I offered to telephone the next morning to see if Miss Rhys felt well enough to see me later in the week. Thereupon Janet counselled against telephoning in the morning and offered to present my credentials to Miss Rhys while I waited in the car. After ten minutes Janet came out to the garden gate to say that Miss Rhys would see me the next day at two o'clock.

When I left my rented car the next afternoon, I was asked to leave my camera in the car and shortly after I was seated (*after* Miss Rhys) I was quizzed whether I had brought a tape recorder. Since my own aversion to tape recorders equalled Miss Rhys', I passed muster. These protective strategies were only a prologue to the avoidances that clouded the first half hour of my visit. Only after docilely abandoning efforts to obtain answers to specific questions such as the ones regarding the number of years spent in Devon and in Cornwall did the conversation take a more congenial direction. Acting as hostess, Janet served tall goblets of chilled

martinis. We all lighted cigarettes and I ventured one last investigatory topic.

Trying to date a letter that Jean Rhys had written to Alec Waugh sometime in the fifties, I asked Miss Rhys if she recalled that Waugh had cited her in *The Sugar Islands*. The citation was significant because Waugh explained in it some of Rhys' novelistic tendencies in terms of her Dominican birth, and he recognized her importance as a novelist before the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* had rescued her from oblivion. I attempted to explain briefly my need to date the London letter but Miss Rhys appeared unable to place Waugh or his books that I mentioned. The question was followed by an awkward silence that Miss Rhys relieved by proceeding to interview me! She asked me questions about Dominica that initiated the discussion of island changes. I then showed her snapshots of the island, and in the pictures she recognized from her 1938 visit the Andrew Carnegie library in Roseau; she remarked upon the long, airy verandas and the rocking chairs placed outside. She said she did not recall seeing the enormous *figus altissimus* growing in the library garden and we discussed whether or not such an enormous tree could have grown since her visit, deciding that perhaps in the tropics it could.

Trees led us to fruit and fruit led us to an item of great interest to Miss Rhys. Could I describe for her the taste of a sapodilla? Unfortunately, I've never knowingly eaten a sapodilla and could not describe its' flavour. I wondered if she were referring to a mammece apple with which I was familiar, and Janet speculated about custard apples with which she was familiar from Australia. After we discussed the colour, texture and size of the three fruits, we decided that the latter two were not sapodillas. We searched for a means of locating a sapodilla, perhaps in London. Would Fortnum and Mason be able to provide one? If so, how would they deliver it to the back of beyond? I offered to locate sapodillas on my own Caribbean island of Tortola, but then how would I ship them in order to have them arrive in edible condition? We concluded that the only satisfactory way of solving the sapodilla

problem was to have Miss Rhys revisit the West Indies. She asked me if I planned to return to Dominica and I rejoined I would if she and Janet would accompany me.

Abandoning sapodillas we turned to roads. I provided a colourful account of driving at break-neck speed across the Imperial Road and the Transinsular Highway, round mountain curves, and up and down the grades of the Dominican mountains followed closely by a Geest lorry filled with bananas and men anxious to arrive at the weighing station on their last trip of the day. No pull-offs, no passing lane ensured a hair-raising race. After my account, we traced on a map of Dominica where roads used to be, where roads now are, and where roads might be built in the future.

The remainder of the afternoon went quickly and pleasantly. In retrospect, we conversed about sapodillas, roads, Phyllis Allfrey, the idiosyncrasies of island mail, creole dresses and madras head squares, cockroaches and the absence thereof, the value of letters, the loss of privacy, Miss Rhys' fear of wasps, and whether or not Dominica had changed substantially. We never got to feminism or the interpretation of Miss Rhys' novels. We did, however, establish the foundation of a relationship that was afterwards sustained by letters. The primary subject of our subsequent correspondence was the strategy necessary to bring Phyllis Allfrey's *The Orchid House* back into print. Miss Rhys searched for her copy of the novel but could not find it. She asked her agent to locate a copy for her; he could not, and I finally mailed a copy to her. In the meantime, I wrote to Dominica telling Mrs Allfrey that Jean Rhys wished me to send her love and to say that we would see what could be done about the novel's reappearance. Phyllis emerged from the shock of her daughter's death in Botswana to undertake a new novel about Phina and Dominica while asking me to represent her in negotiating for a papercover edition of the first novel. (With typical concern she believes that West Indians can't afford a hardcover edition.)

The correspondence triangle closed when Jean Rhys wrote to



Phyllis Allfrey concerning my visit and her promise of a preface. Phyllis replied to Jean with the hope that in the preface Jean Rhys would write something to the effect that Mrs Allfrey was a West Indian who had finally come home. And then Senator Lennox Honychurch in Dominica heard the B.B.C. announcement of Jean's death. Finally, I have a note from Phyllis in Dominica: 'Elaine – So Jean is gone – I don't think she ever finished the promised foreword. I have felt so sad this week.' Mrs Allfrey's sadness is, of course, not that the foreword may not have been written. It is over the loss of a friendship sustained for many decades across the Sargasso Sea. Underneath is sorrow that Jean Rhys could not return to Dominica to die. Among our letters was an elaborate discussion of the feasibility of a return trip – the flight to Antigua – would Miss Rhys' health sustain the rigours of the transfers. It was a prospect that answered Miss Rhys' cry: 'I hav'ent [sic] been at all well and am longing for some sort of holiday.'

The return of Jean Rhys to Dominica was a possibility that could not fail to engage the imagination of her admirers. In *The West Indies Chronicle* last year, Graham Norton described a story by Miss Rhys 'about Dominica . . . to which Miss Rhys' spirit will surely return, one day, when it is released. In so many ways, she, like so many emigrants, has never altogether left'. Miss Rhys herself approached the possibility with infinite delicacy in 'I Used to Live Here Once'. And there is the poem in *Palm and Oak* written by Phyllis Allfrey for her friend Jean Rhys: 'The Child's Return'.

I remember a far tall island  
floating in cobalt paint  
The thought of it is a childhood dream  
torn by a midnight plaint

There are painted ships and rusty ships  
that pass the island by,  
and one dark day I'll board a boat  
when I am ready to die

The timbers will creak and my heart will break  
and the sailors will lay my bones  
on the stiff rich grass, as sharp as spikes,  
by the volcanic stones.



Dominican landscape – Photograph by Anna Rutherford

## Jean Rhys: a tribute

It was Lennox who broke the news to us. Usually we listen to the BBC news and News about Britain; but on Wednesday morning we listened to DBS, trying to find out what new imbecility the Government of Dominica was up to. So we missed the notice, worthy of a Prime Minister, about our friend's departure from life. Lennox knew how close she was to us, and had read some of her short letters starting 'Dearest . . .' in a huge crabbed handwriting.

Well, it was hardly a surprise; she was 84; and in her last letter she had said 'I am cracking up'. The strangest thing of all is that so many Dominicans do not realise what a great writer Jean was. Someone asked me whether she was a feminist. I should not say so, though she was intensely independent and championed womanhood when it was degraded or ill-used by man; she hit back with the most marvellous derision. At one stage, after she was abandoned by a wealthy admirer, she drank, she took drugs, she took lovers. Yet she maintained an absolute integrity as an artist, always writing the truth, even when it hurt her own self.

She was a Dominican. 'I'm the fifth generation born out here on my mother's side' she wrote in *Voyage in the Dark*. And even though she left Dominica at the age of sixteen all her books have at times a strong yearning towards the island.

I am happy to have discovered Jean's greatness and become her friend long before she became famous. I had been told by my mother that Jean was a rebel, and 'rather fast'; that she had let down the Williams family by her life as a stage chorine and a wanderer in Europe. 'That woman who writes those terrible books' was how my aunt described her. I read *Voyage in the Dark* in America, and was instantly enchanted. After that I tried to get a copy of each book she wrote.

Robert and I met her at last in England, during her early middle age and our youth. She always called us 'my young friends'. I had to remind her the other day that we were no longer her young friends. I recall a wonderful ballet party she arranged with us for her 18-year-old girl Maryvonne, daughter of her first husband, a Dutchman.

Then came the war. And a terrible thing happened. We did not learn of it until long afterwards. Maryvonne, who was visiting Jewish friends, disappeared during the Nazi invasion. Her mother's heart was broken. *She* also vanished for years. We thought she was dead. Then, one day, a broadcast appeal from the BBC: 'Will Jean Rhys kindly contact the BBC, she will learn something to her advantage . . .' This was often repeated. And at last she was discovered, in a tiny cottage in Southern England. From then on she returned to the world of literature, and gradually, gradually, her reputation was assured. And then - in 1966 - Andre Deutsch published *The Wide Sargasso Sea*. This made her a fortune. But as she wrote to us, 'when I was young and lovely I had only one dress and now Dior and Chanel offer me their masterpieces'.

What I admired most about her was her persistent courage. Through pain, starvation, heart-break and ill-health she kept on writing to the very end. She had completed her autobiography this year.

I once wrote a poem for her.

I remember a fair tall island  
floating in cobalt paint;  
the thought of it is a childhood dream  
torn by a midnight plaint

There are painted ships and rusty ships  
That pass the island by,  
and one dark day I'll board a boat  
when I am ready to die, . . .

But she didn't board that boat, though she longed to do so. She died in the land that had ultimately given her refuge and riches – England.

We are glad that Maryvonne was saved by the Jews and will inherit her mother's fortune. And we are more than glad that Jean Rhys lived, wrote, and was recognised.



Jean Rhys's home in Roseau



Phyllis Allfrey

These photos were taken ten days before hurricane David hit Dominica and completely destroyed Roseau.

## Dear Primitive

Elaine crossed the Arcade with a vague sense of unease. Suva looked stale and sickly bright in the sun. How quickly the morning, which began so cheerfully for her, had exhausted itself; burnt itself out, she thought. She smiled weakly at a pupil in holiday clothes. At the crossing the shoppers merged and then broke into different directions.

She woke up rather early in the morning and sat on her bed, legs folded, and watched the light pour in through the diffused clouds. That old feeling of being bruised and imprisoned had disappeared. She told herself at last she was beginning to come to terms with herself. After a quick breakfast of eggs and cold milk, she took the bus to Suva, feeling a little guilty for this week-day freedom. But she managed to brush the feeling aside. Once in the city she did not know what to do. She sat through a movie with six other people in the entire cinema. Afterwards she wandered absent-mindedly from shop to shop and bought things she did not require at Woolworth's. During the weekend there was a tourist ship at the wharf and the streets were full of foreigners. Now the city looked empty. She walked to a Chinese restaurant to eat after the lunch-hour customers had gone. She sat there for a long time smoking and listening to the soft rattle of the bead curtain – like pebbles under water.

To avoid returning to her apartment immediately, she decided to stroll along the sea-wall back to Nasese. She lived in the old section of Nasese, consisting mainly of wooden bungalows which were being gradually over-taken by new concrete houses on stilts. The bungalows had a permanently neglected and melancholy look: the paint had worn off from the wood, the galvanised iron

roofs were rusted by the action of sea water, and weeds flourished in the backyards. The front wooden fences, festooned with insects, needed repair. Once the residences of European civil servants, the bungalows were now owned by Indian merchants from Suva. Elaine rented a semi-detached house here. It was cheap and near the sea.

She threw the windows open. The sea appeared choppy and the tide lapped against the sea-wall, rocking the sea debris. She had planned to wash her hair but she soon lost interest. She hitched her dress over her thighs and dropped on the unmade bed. A bee buzzed against the screen door, found its way into the kitchen and continued to buzz in the dirty utensils. She heard the faint clank clank of a knife in the neighbour's garden which added sadness to the still monotony of the hot afternoon. She picked up a hand mirror from the mantel-piece and studied the profile of her face and hair. Her face looked burnt and puffy and her hair, yellow like corn, was plaited as in an old photograph taken when she was nine.

She often asked herself why she had stayed when all her old acquaintances had either left the islands or were planning to leave. The shop-keeper at Nasese often asked her, "So, Miss, when you leaving?" Why did she stay? What was she waiting for? There were no easy answers to these questions. Her immediate response was she stayed because this is where she was born. This was her country. There was nowhere else she wanted to go. But her relationship with the country was vague. After her parents had settled in New Zealand and Ronnie left her abruptly that night, there seemed fewer links with the place. She knew the world around her would never open up to her completely. Yet she waited for it to open up and claim her.

Her relationship with Ronnie was based on a chance encounter; it finished with the suddenness of such a contact. Ronnie had come to Fiji with the express purpose of making the best of the sun and sea. This brief romance with a good-looking island girl completed the pleasure of a package tour. Every weekend he drove her

to the holiday places and tried out the food and facilities at different resorts. She was of course grateful for his attention. She even tried to evoke within herself a sense of adventure for his sake. For a short period at least her past seemed like a dream that was over. However, all these activities in the sun left her feeling a little fraudulent, like pretending to be happy on a melancholy day. She realised that no amount of active life could thaw the cold spot that was her past. It was there she wanted him to reach her and understand what it was like.

It wasn't long before she discovered that one world was shattering into another. It happened first at the golf course. Ronnie was crouched on the green, leaning forward, his left elbow on his knee, putter in his right hand. The greenskeeper was burning mounds of grass on the edge of the fairway. Suddenly the green started to smoulder and crackle. She felt a wave of heat against her face. The sky turned orange, saffron-splashed. A heat mirage danced in front of her and pursued her across the green. She hurried back to the safety of the club house. From there she saw the grass was all consumed; there were two dark smoking patches where the mounds had been. Ronnie and the greenskeeper were transfixed where she had left them.

She asked Ronnie that night if he believed there were things about the islands which no outsider could ever understand. Her father used to say that about the sea and the hills at Vandrakula.

'But you aren't a foreigner, my dear primitive', Ronnie replied in a jocular manner.

'I know', she answered quickly without looking at him.

Ronnie stared at her face for a moment; then started to tell her about the tourist couple he met at the yacht club. She didn't want to pursue the subject any further.

Elaine worked with the children all day, and learnt many ways to occupy herself in the evening. She read her favourite books, or took a walk along the sea-wall. Sometimes she painted or tended to the potted plants. Late in the night when it was very still, as



only islands can be, she heard the surf breaking on the reef, bringing back memories of her childhood. She selected those states or feelings which gave her special pleasure and, unencumbered, she turned them in her mind as she pleased. She knew in some strange way her life at the cottage by the sea held the key to her present unease.

The cottage was a mile east of Vandrakula. On one side of it were the stately coconut groves spreading out to the hills – a series of volcanic mounds cloaked in green foliage. On the other side was the enigmatic sea. The hills entered into the sea just beyond the village. From the cottage the dark boulders looked like a herd of animals struggling out of the sea.

The cottage was built from native wood and reeds. Charles had fashioned some European-type furniture from local timber. It was always sunny in the cottage. The floor was covered with sand. She remembered Amy complaining, 'There is too much sand here and too much sun'. And she pulled the blinds down. Charles sat at the breakfast table, bare-chested, wearing a topce. He smiled at Elaine across the table. Charles had very brown teeth and a ginger beard. After breakfast, he disappeared in the bush with his Fijian friends.

Amy rarely went out. Everything outside the cottage seemed to clash with her feelings. Above all she avoided the beach because of sand fleas. All day she shuffled about in the cottage moaning about the heat and the smell from the village. Once every week she walked to the Chinese shop for green vegetables. She wore her hair neatly in a small bunch at the back. The rest of her person had taken on a permanently bedraggled appearance.

Charles started a small medical centre at Vandrakula. Elaine knew Charles wasn't a real doctor. He had learned something about medicine in the army. She couldn't figure out why her parents had come to the islands. Once she heard her father say that every white person on the islands was either a criminal or a fugitive. She didn't believe her parents were these things.

Every Sunday Charles read from an old Bible to the villagers in

a large open bure. She remembered watching the lizards slide down the massive pole in the middle of the bure and snap at the moths. After church she played with Akanisi and Mere on the beach. Amy said her hair was full of lice acquired from the two native girls.

When it rained the sea took on a mournful expression. The beach was drab and slushy. Elaine would shut herself in her bedroom and read *The Count of Monte Cristo* or *Jane Eyre*. One afternoon her parents had gone to call on the Thaggards who were trying some Angus Brahmin cows on their farm. It was raining in the sea. Elaine was reading *Jane Eyre* in her bedroom. She was so completely absorbed she could hear the ridiculing laughter of the crazy woman in the attic and the grating of a key in the door below. Just then she heard a knocking on the front door: it was like knocking in a dream. She peeped out the bedroom window. There was no one at the door. She saw Akanisi chasing after a hermit crab in the rain. Farther on some villagers were riding horses on the beach.

When she heard the knocking again, she opened the front door. That was the first time she saw Senibulu. She was standing shyly behind old Radini. It was hard to say how old Seni was; later she discovered it was the most difficult thing to tell about her. She was taller than Elaine but much darker. And she wore a soiled white frock. They sat in the lounge for some time; then suddenly Radini asked if they could leave. She invited Elaine to the village. Elaine went back to her book but her mind kept wandering to Seni and Radini. She couldn't work out why they had come to see her.

Seni guided Elaine near the dark boulders from where the two volcanic shields on the side of the hills looked like giant turtles. They watched the boulders gamboling in the waves. The sun beat down most severely on the boulders: the specks of foam were soaked up as soon as they were tossed on the rocks. Seni initiated Elaine into the mysteries of the sea. Together they collected cowrie shells or followed the progress of a mollusk that had left its shell. Seni showed her sea snakes bobbing in the waves and she

tried to imagine Medusa's head! Elaine learnt from Seni the art of changing every situation into a legend. Sometimes Seni transformed herself into a sea goddess and raced away from her side, squealing with laughter, because she was nudged by a local demon. Elaine observed her outrageous behaviour with great amazement. Charles laughed when she told him about her friend and said Seni was an elf.

She wondered why Charles said that. And why Radini asked her to regard Seni as her sister. Alone in her bedroom at night, she tried to link Seni with Marnie, her still-born sister, who was buried at sea. She had heard Amy accuse Charles of liaisons with native women. Perhaps Seni really was her sister.

Suddenly she stopped visiting the village. Charles had seen a Japanese disguised as a coolie in the hills. Amy slept with her bed pan in her room. 'Time has become historic again', Charles remarked one morning at breakfast. Earlier the Thaggards had decided to sell their farm to an Indian family. Charles and Amy spent a good deal of their time with the Thaggards before they left for England. Her friendship with Seni was short-lived, but she realised that in some profound sense, which she was unable to assess even now, it had altered her whole existence.

One afternoon Elaine was alone in her room. Her parents had gone to Thaggard's farm. Elaine heard knocking on the front door. Her heart pounding, she opened the door. Radini was standing outside, alone, her head bowed. Her eyes were red with crying. Between sobs she told her about the accident at the rocks and Seni's disappearance. The villagers searched for weeks but failed to recover her body.

Elaine locked herself in her room and cried until she dozed off. When she opened her eyes it was almost dark. She heard Amy's voice in the kitchen, 'You should have seen them. Near-naked in their dhoties. Sitting on the empty crates as if they were already the owners of the property. Poor Jane she had such difficulty shoosng the impertinent beggers away. . .'

She remembered the gleam in Amy's eyes as soon as the

steamer touched the pier at Suva. Amy was in a beige suit, leaning on Charles' arm, observing good-humouredly the changes she already saw in streets and shops. Charles looked bored and exhausted in his clean shirt and pants. Amy kept wiping away the sweat on his red and creased neck. Elaine was sick with influenza for weeks after their arrival. She rested in bed reading and thinking about Seni and the cottage by the sea.

Amy immediately set about establishing herself in the white community, among people who she believed might be useful to them. One of her friends, Beryl, the minister's wife, found a position for Charles in the Civil Service. Amy's social life was somewhat spoiled by a boorish husband and a daughter who was attractive enough but lacked poise, and who spoke English with a bad accent. Soon she started complaining about the smell and heat again. Charles spent most of his time drinking at clubs.

Elaine's thoughts returned to Ronnie and their last happy evening together. She seldom spoke to him about her Fijian friends. Ronnie seemed unenthusiastic when she mentioned them. That evening he suggested they drive to the government compound – to her 'native friends'. 'And don't apologise for everything, remember', he remarked cheerfully. His comments often left her feeling inadequate and maimed; that particular night she ignored his words.

The barracks were less than ten minutes drive from her apartment. The women were sitting in the yard in their florid garments when they arrived. The men had gone to fish on the reef. Their lights were visible in the sea.

Elaine was at once thrilled and surprised to see Radini there. She first saw Radini in Suva in a throng of people at the government buildings. The sky above the buildings was 'metallic grey'. On the lawn scattered groups of people were watching, with considerable amusement, two ancient-looking Fijian women executing a tribal rite. The back of one of the women was hunched like a turtle shell. The other woman was equally short and thick. Their chanting grew more intense as Elaine drew closer. She recognised

the chant dimly: it was a call to the ancestral spirits to cleanse the land. In the crowd she caught a glimpse of Radini's face, but before Elaine could call her name she disappeared behind a wall of people.

She waited for Radini to show some recognition of their past friendship. But Radini seemed cold and surly, and she deliberately ignored Ronnie. She served him a bowl of kava and immediately turned to the others and whispered something in Fijian. They tittered together, completely disregarding the visitors. Soon they started singing. Elaine clapped her hands softly as the music came back to her.

'It was like picture-postcard', Ronnie remarked as they drove back. 'The yellow moon, the soft singing, and the hush. . .'

'And friendly natives', she added looking into his eyes.

'And friendly natives', he smiled good-naturedly, and slipped his arm around her.

The village appeared again in her dream that night. She was being dragged into the sea between the dark boulders. She woke up in fright when the flower pot fell and cracked in the bedroom, spreading the red earth on the floor. Ronnie said it was the acoustics which caused the accident.

Her troubles with Ronnie started soon afterwards. She was edgy the moment they arrived at the Playhouse one Saturday night. After the play Ronnie decided they ought to stay back and talk to the players. Elaine moved in the gathering, aware only of the subdued voices over the tea-cups that crashed against the saucers, and the clicking of heels on the polished floor. She didn't care for Ronnie's observations to the players. Nor was she interested in striving assiduously to say the right things for him. She slipped her handbag into the crook of her arm and stepped outside.

The air was clear and restful. There wasn't a sound of traffic. She stood in the garden letting the cool night penetrate her body. She remained there for a long time, totally oblivious of who she was and why she was there.

Then it happened again. The leaves of the crotons began to move. A soft rustle at first, the next instant the wind leapt from the hedge to the ground in front of her, kicking and sucking and pulling at the hem of her dress. She thought she would never be able to move. Fighting against the weariness that was over-taking her, she pulled herself together and retraced her steps back to the Playhouse.

She didn't speak to Ronnie in the car. She decided that moment he must leave her. She wanted to be free again. He had moved in with her on his own accord and now he had taken control over her whole existence. She wasn't going to be crushed and humiliated by him any more. Once in the house, her distraught mind poured out all the dumb resentment it had stored up. Shocked by the violence of her reaction, he tried to calm her, holding her shoulder, 'You're hyper-sensitive. Overwrought. Let's talk when you're calmer'. She forced him away from her, without once looking at him. He sat on the edge of the bed for a long time, waiting for her to take control of herself. Suddenly he dived into the bathroom, grabbing his shirt from a chair. She heard the car pull out of the yard; the next moment it sped away towards Suva. She fell on the bed and wept with humiliation and rage.

Elaine was shaken from her thoughts by a soft scurrying movement in the corridor. Someone was walking towards the kitchen, stopped when the floorboard creaked. The muscles in her stomach knotted as she held her breath and waited. The feet started to move with anxious haste towards the back door. Before the figure disappeared, she caught a glimpse of the grinning profile, the long muslin dress and the diamonds on the fingers.

She jumped off the bed and rushed to the back door crying, 'Seni. . . Senibulu!' She looked out into the yard. There was no one about except a dog, which dozed peacefully on the lawn. The only thing unusual was that there was too much light all around. As she turned inside the leaves of the mango tree stirred frantically for a second and then everything was still. Next door, an Indian

girl stood erect in her garden, knife in hand.

She returned to her bedroom feeling surprisingly calm. She heard a dog bark in the neighbourhood. Then another and another, until the noise was like a wailing, skirmishing crowd.

The clock in the kitchen indicated 5:30 p.m. when she woke up. It was chilly and dark inside the house. She poured herself a glass of cold milk from the fridge and looked out the window. The clouds had turned charcoal black as night crept over the sea.

She went back to bed again. In the middle of the night she heard the waves pounding against the reef. She saw the foam splash on the dark boulders and a white line of waves receded into the cold primeval sea. Soon the pounding started again until it grew into a deafening boom. The reef cracked and the dark waters flowed into her head. She knew she was drowned.

JØRGEN RIBER CHRISTENSEN

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## Distorted Reflections: The Visual Depiction of Africa in European Art

The last years have seen a growing interest in how European writers throughout history have written about Africa and Africans, and a number of studies of this subject have been published.<sup>1</sup> The question of how we have *seen* and *see* Africa has by and large been left unanswered, and by going into a historical analysis of how European pictorial artists have depicted Africa I shall try to give a preliminary answer. Preliminary because of the

brevity of this article compared to the historical period and vast geographical area I seek to cover. In the same way the view of history on which I base my analyses of some pictures may seem too general and unsupported, but I am nevertheless sure that certain *tendencies* are quite clear and are reflected in the pictures I analyse.

## DELIMITATION OF THE PICTORIAL MATERIAL

The delimitation and organization of the number of pictures on which I base my analysis of the European depiction of Africa are two-sided. On the one hand there is an external point of view with regard to the pictorial material, and on the other an internal. The external organization of the material is a mainly statistical exposition of the frequency of depictions of Africa and the context in which they are found. It is obvious that a simple matter like the very number of depictions of Africa is of great importance if one wants to say anything about the degree of contact between Europe and Africa. One extreme is of course no contact at all and consequent ignorance, but I must hasten to add that this does not mean that no pictures of Africa or Africans can be found. What is typical of pictures from periods with little or no contact is that they have no relation to reality whatsoever, but rather are projections of the European's subconsciousness as may be seen in the fabulous monsters of antiquity and the middle ages. The other extreme is the flood of written and visual descriptions of Africa which went together with the creation and establishment of the British Empire. The number of depictions in itself does not say anything in an absolute sense of how close a contact there has been at a given time, but must be seen in relation to the total pictorial production. Another external aspect which must be taken into account is the question of what genres are to be included in the analysis. This question is among other things historically determined, as for instance the importance of photography is insignificant or non-existent before 1850, just as the importance of oil painting is





Blemmye or the headless monster, which Pliny the Elder recounts lives along the Niger: 'Blemmyae sine capite sunt atque os et oculos in pectore gerunt.'

minimal in the twentieth century. In other words, the selection of the material to be analysed will not be made from aesthetical or traditional art historical criteria, but rather from the wide area called visual communications.

The other group of criteria is the internal, which has to do with the motifs of the pictures. The representative part of the picture must naturally in one way or another be connected to that part of reality to which Africa belongs in the European mind. As it will take us too far within the bounds of this article to deal with all aspects of Africa such as topography or animal life the subject will be limited to the black African himself. On the other hand, this does not mean that one should be unaware of the circumstances that make the European see Africa as one big diamond mine or safari park and completely disregard the African himself.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PICTORIAL MATERIAL AND THE HISTORICAL PERIODS

The pictorial material to be analysed covers seven centuries and in the following pages it will be connected to the historical progression in the relationship between Africa and Europe. The analyses of a limited number of typical depictions will be closely interwoven with the historical periods, but the internal tradition within the specific genres of art forms must necessarily be taken into account. More is permitted within satirical comics than say in an oil painting, though an entirely innocent joke still remains to be seen.

The relationship between Europe and Africa may for our purpose be divided into six partly chronologically concurrent periods, namely:

1. Ignorance and the beginning of contact: fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.
2. (Equal) trade partners: sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.
3. The slave trade: late seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
4. The integration of Africa into the capitalist world market or colonialism: nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
5. Neo-colonialism: twentieth century.
6. Towards revolution and independence from capitalist world market: twentieth century.

The first period where only little happens covers a little less than two centuries, viz., the fourteenth and fifteenth. Until the Portuguese rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1486 and later sailed up along the East coast of Africa to find the sea route to India Europe's knowledge of Africa only consisted of legends, and the few depictions from the fourteenth century tell us more about Europe than they do about Africa. In his 'The Mocking of Christ'

(1305-7) Giotto depicts an African, but his function in the painting is simply to add an exotic touch and point out that the action takes place in Jerusalem. You do see an authentic African, but not in Africa. In a map from 1375 of the Kingdom of Mali this happens, but the African in question is of a legendary nature, namely Prester John, who has been created by the European wish to find a strong Christian ally in the crusades against Islam.

In the late fifteenth century after the Portuguese contact with East Africa the African is seen more often in art. He is still not seen in his natural surroundings, but is from now on found in the traditional motif of the Magi. It is important to notice that the



Gezigen tot Sint Jans, *The Magi*, late fifteenth century. In this Dutch painting the only difference between the Magi is the colour of the African king. His face and hair is typically European. Apparently the artist has only heard about, and not actually seen an African.

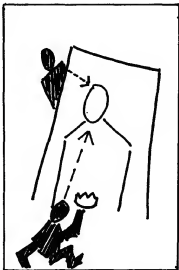
three magi are only differentiated with regard to age and race and not with regard to status. In this picture the connection between subservient status and black race has not yet been established.

The late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries saw a significant rise in the number of depictions of Africans. Africa was becoming important as a trade partner. Africa was in no way inferior to Europe as her well-organised kingdoms could easily cope with the European trade posts on the coasts. The primary interest pre-industrialised Europe had in Africa was still trade, and the thing sought after was luxury goods. Only few slaves were sold to Europe, where they were part of the representative façade of the courts. Africa's relationship to Europe had a dual expression in the art of this period because of the character of the European class society. On the one hand there are the portraits of African ambassadors and kings which are indistinguishable from European representative portraits. On the other hand the European



*Ambassador from the Congo (1641).* This African nobleman could with no difficulty take part in European court life on equal footing with other nobles

view of Africans that was to continue till today started to be formed in this period. In the visual arts the African is represented in a different fashion from the European. This development starts within the representative courtly portrait, where the cringing African servant becomes a fixed (formal) element.



(Drawing.) The courtly portrait celebrating the prince tends to follow a certain pattern. The African is placed behind or under the European noble or prince, and his form is often partly covered. The direction of the gaze goes from the African to the prince, who ignores his servant.



This pattern is found in a large number of portraits within this genre. Here Jacob D'Agar's *Louise de Kéroualle*, 1699. The ideological implications of the African girl who offers a crown to the duchess are obvious.

With the introduction of the sugar industry to the West Indies and the consequent demand for labour, Africa's relationship to Europe was radically changed as it now became a supplier of slaves. According to one estimate the extent of the slave trade was such that whereas in 1650 18-20 per cent of the world population was African in 1850 it had dropped to between 8 and 9 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Through the triangular trade the slave trade was one of the major

sources of the original accumulation of wealth in Europe, which made industrialization possible at the same time as it destroyed the African societies, partly by removing the productive part of the population and partly by causing almost uninterrupted wars. The economic 'necessity' which created the slave trade was followed by an ideology that sought to justify it. The descriptions of trade with Africa now incorporated a value judgement. African societies were described as the negation of everything human and decent; African religions were made into evil superstitions; forms



Thomas Stothard's *The Black Venus' Voyage from Angola to the West Indies* (late eighteenth century) may be said to be a slightly idealised version of the slave ships. The picture shows a lie about the status of female slaves and at the same time it removes the slave trade from reality and takes it into a mythological and classical sphere. The spectator is reminded of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* rather than of his own historical reality.

of governments were described as despotism, and the more blood-thirsty aspects of life in Africa (which often were the results of the slave trade) were brought into the foreground. The African himself was dehumanised, and often seen as the product of his subconscious lusts. The consequence of these myths was that it was not only justifiable but even desirable to keep the African as a slave because in this way he was brought into contact with his superior white masters and his spiritual salvation was more assured by leading him into Christianity and civilization. In depictions of Africa from this period one scene of bloodshed runs into another. Often this is crudely done, but it may also take the form of innuendo as in 'A Scene on the Niger', where the scene of bloodshed is only a tiny detail in the picture and not the main action.



Captain Allen, *Some on the Niger* (1832). Note the decapitation on the left hand side. One must assume from this illustration that decapitations are so common in Africa that nobody even seems to take notice.

With this conception of Africa at the back of his mind it is small wonder that the European saw himself as the black man's saviour, and what is then more natural for the black man than to show his





W. Blake, *Hanged Slave* (1793) From Steadman.

gratitude and devotion. The affectionate black servant or slave became a commonplace of this period. Formally it is significant that the African nearly always is below the European in the picture.

As slavery became less economically necessary and the abolitionist campaign (albeit prompted essentially for economic reasons by the Free Trade advocates) started, one of its means of propaganda was to show the reality of the slave trade through pictures which emphasized the slave traders' cruelties. William Blake did this consistently in his illustrations of J. G. Steadman's *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, 1793. He did not depict the slave drivers as Arabs, as was



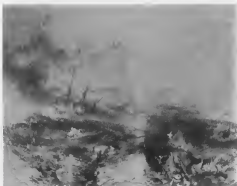
W. Blake, Frontispiece, 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion' (1795)

usually done, but as Europeans. Blake's understanding of the fact that the oppression of the Africans was connected to the oppression of himself and his class can be pictorially detected in the similarity between manacled and distorted Europeans and Africans in his engravings and etchings. Blake's sense of solidarity with the rest of oppressed humanity is brought forward clearly in the plate called 'Europe, supported by Africa and Asia' where the motif of the Three Graces is changed into an expression of inter-racial harmony. That Blake, in contrast to many abolitionists, was not paternalistic towards the Africans can also be seen in the



W. Blake, *Europe, supported by Africa and Asia* (1793), from *Steadman's Narrative*.

poem from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* called 'The Little Black Boy' where it is the black boy who leads the white to God, and not the other way around. The paternalist view of the abolitionist movement is reflected in the Wedgwood medallion, which became its symbol. The medallion depicts a kneeling and manacled African slave, and it says 'Am I not a man and a brother'. The kneeling African nevertheless belongs to the pattern found in the courtly representative portrait where a standing African seldom is found. The indignation against slavery had a stronger expression in Turner's 'The Slave Ship', which was exhibited at the Royal Academy with this descriptive title, 'Slavers throwing overboard the dead and dying - Typhoon coming on'. This painting is a fitting reply to 'The Black Venus' Voyage'.



Turner, *Slave Ship*, 1840. The blood red colours and the storm in the background of the painting stand as a comment on the drowning slaves in the foreground.

The somewhat paternalist views of the abolitionist movement could painlessly continue into the new historical period, the integration of Africa into the capitalist world market. The political manifestation of the economic integration was colonialism, and the age of imperialism or of the monopoly stage of capitalism had an overt political manifestation in the Scramble for Africa, which culminated in the Berlin Conference in 1885. As the capitalist countries had moved into the monopoly stage free trade became impossible, and the European great powers divided Africa between them, so that they each could have monopolistic control over their area. The picture of Africans that Europe now needed was one of children, who could not rule themselves. It follows that Africans were still regarded as inferior human beings whose savage and disgusting customs ought to be removed by colonial administrators and missionaries. However, Africa was not seen as



In the Danish satirical magazine *Klodt Hans* No 14, 1917, the Danish West Indies are caricatured as negro children with thick lips who have to be led by the hand by their Uncle Sam. Their Danish parents are waving goodbye.

the white man's grave anymore. Just as they exported their capital to Africa, so gradually Europeans started to export the emotions which could not express themselves within a narrow European class system. In 'The Snake Tree' (1867) which is an illustration by Klous of Jules Verne's *Five Weeks in a Balloon* Africa is still a threat, whereas in Rousseau's 'The Snake Charmer' (1907) Africa is depicted as an area from which one can profit emotionally and artistically as well as economically. The exotic landscape is an expression of beauty and poetry. The petit-bourgeois artist in Europe was able to identify with an unreal Africa, and this tendency tells us something about the ambivalent position of the



Ricu, *The Snake Tree*, 1862. Africa as a threat with allusions to the Fall.



Rousseau, *The Snake Charmer*, 1907. Reminiscent of *The Snake Tree*, but here the Pau-like piper is in harmony with nature like a Romantic poet.



Two connected illustrations from Barne Hogarth's *Tarzan of the Apes*. The pictorial parallel between the dancing apes and Africans is typical of the racialist stereotypes, which are often found in children's comics.

artist as a bohemian living outside bourgeois society, just as it tells us that the African is reduced to a secondary reflection of the European's suppressed emotional life. This reflection does not always have the positive aspects of emotional freedom; more often the African is depicted as the negative aspects of the European subconsciousness, e.g. Freud's Id, and he then represents aggressions and pure sexuality. Quite often the black colour of his skin is taken as an external sign of sin and wickedness. At any rate he is less rational than the European, like a child, or he may be completely dehumanised and depicted as a slow evolution of the ape.

Around 1960 the colonialist stage of imperialism started to change into neo-colonialism. One of several reasons for this was that the economic integration of Africa into the world market had now been completed through the political and military force of colonialism. It now became possible to grant the colonies formal political independence without endangering the economic relations. Another decisive cause was that the U.S.A. after the Second World War appeared as the strongest economic power, and it therefore wanted to extend its influences both economically and politically to the reserves of the now weaker colonial countries. The formal political independence demanded a new ideological stance to Africa, as she now should appear as the equal of Europe. The contradiction between political equality and economic exploitation is ideologically reflected in the contradiction between official representative pictures like 'Poul Hartling and Chief Akotoh' and the image of Africa found in other visual media such as comics and films where the old imperialist patterns and stereotypes are still flourishing. The internal traditions of these genres do not fully account for this fact.

The alternative to neo-colonialist exploitation may be to break loose from the imperialist world and set up a socialist state, quite often through a violent revolution. This freedom struggle seldom finds a visual expression in the imperialist world outside of those groups who have allied themselves with the anti-imperialist struggle. The quantitatively insignificant visual material with the





In this official press photo (1971) the former Danish foreign secretary Paul Hartling and the Ghanaian Chief Akotoh are on the same pictorial level.

freedom struggle as motif may either depict oppression and exploitation, or the struggle itself and visions of complete independence from imperialism.

The tendencies found in my analyses of European pictures of Africans should hopefully have shown some of the parts of the ideology that surrounds Africa in the European mind. The European image of Africa is to a very large extent determined by the historical and economical relations between the two continents, and this fact has given rise to a discrepancy between reality and ideology, which conserved and still conserves that exploitation which has been a decisive part of Europe's relationship to Africa. An awareness of this fact should not only be limited to the analysis of written texts but also to the whole visual field that surrounds us.



This photo from the back of a Danish socialist book (*Det levende Afrika*) contains both elements of the struggle and of future victory. These two elements are expressed through two traditional symbols, a gun and a young African mother with her child, but the agitational effect of the photo mainly stems from their startling juxtaposition.

## NOTES

1 Among others:

Curtin, Philip D., *The Image of Africa*, 2 vols., University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, 1964. Contains some excellent analyses of its illustrations.

Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin White Masks*, Paladin, Bungay Suffolk, 1973.

Hammond, Dorothy and Alta Jablow, *The Africa That Never Was*, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1970.

Kiernan, V. G., *The Lords of Human Kind*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972.

Killam, G. D., *Africa in English Fiction 1874-1939*, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan, 1968.

Raskin, Jonah, *The Mythology of Imperialism*, Random House, New York, 1971.

2. Gustavsson, Rolf, ed., *Kapitelnummer Utveckling i Afrika*, Bo Cavefors Bokförlag, Stockholm, 1971, vol. 1, p. 25.

## Next Issue Includes:

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### *Articles*

*James Winford*: 'Making light of the process': Nissim Ezekiel's poetic fictions

*Jeanne N. Dungwa*: Soyinka's *The Road* as Ritual Drama

*Les A. Murray*: The Boroelian Strain

*Gareth Griffiths*: Experiment with Form in Recent Australian Drama

*A. L. M. Leed*: Claude McKay's Adaptation to Audience

*Don Halston*: A Note on Albert Wendt's *Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree*

### *Fiction*

Stories by Yvonne du Fresno, E. A. Markham, Norman Talbot

### *Poetry*

Nissim Ezekiel, Les A. Murray

### *Autobiography*

Don Mattera, Nissim Ezekiel

### *Interviews*

Nadine Gordimer, Wilson Harris

The Year That Was: 1979

## The Proposal

Dear Mr Ranmuttu,

This being my first letter to you please allow me to introduce myself before anything else. I am one Kalupane working in the EXPRESS TRAVEL GROUP. I happened to know you and your esteemed family through one Mr Hatharagama who is also working in our Company today. Through his courtesy and friendship since assuming office, your loving sister was proposed to me as a wife and I agreed to pay a visit as our two horoscopes agreed to a greater extent.

This little trip was made quite some time back and I was not decided on the matter as I had a lot of thinking to be done before arriving at decision. Having been a roaming bachelor for 45 years I need time to adjust to matrimony.

Dear Mr Ranmuttu, I have no regrets whatsoever as I am *happy with the proposal* but I am a person who had one ambition in my life and which I still nurture and, if I am given a bit of assistance, I am willing to go ahead with this matrimony without any further delay. I well know that in the village sometimes, people are suspicious when it comes to parting with their hard earned savings. Therefore I am turning to you to help your family solve the problem of your sister's dowry. Besides I know that you people working in Dubai are rich. Why do Sri Lankans go to the Middle East except to get rich no?

I am now aware that you may give me a brand new car and I am also aware that your sister will be getting whatever she needs from you. But my problem is this. The intention of getting a car is not to roam but to make money so that I can start my own

business. I am not very happy where I am working as I cannot do things my way. I am conversant with the travel trade and I have a travel licence. I have good contacts with Germany, France and even London.

Now if I am to succeed with the travel trade I must have a good house as well as a car as in any business venture the first and foremost thing is that you will have to sell yourself before you can get other things into your hand.

Only a few people understand the real values of marriage and life thereafter. Some people have gone to the extent of criticizing me on the request I have made to you thinking me too greedy. Please do understand me, Mr Ranmuttu. It will be easy for you to understand me, living in a rich oil country, better than people in our villages where money is got out of the land by sweat. Please understand that I am asking all these things not only for me but fitting to your sister's future and to the betterment of the family members. Today money is God. If you have money you can even go to the moon with the Americans and come home safely again, isn't it so Mr Ranmuttu? Let us then try and go to the moon, you and I and . . . of course your sister. With the experience I have gathered in the business field I do not intend getting married just to get a car. With the car I intend doing a lot of other things which will be beneficial to your sister too.

I do not know how you are placed in regard to this request but personally I do not mind if you arrange with your parents or brother to fulfil this request for a car until we make some adjustments at a later date. But I request you earnestly to think carefully so that we could all be happy about everything at the same time. I think, therefore, in the best interest of all, that you and I should handle this Car transaction. If I get married to your sister it does not mean that I am getting married only to your sister but to the entire family of yours. If this thinking is true and clear I must finalise every detail, every fraction of this marriage to suit all of us in all our doings in the future. And, being a man of experience in the business and travel field, I think I may be the best man

to handle such a situation.

Of course I cannot tell these things to your parents, brother or sister as they are not in a position to understand what my future plans are. Further their minds have been somewhat prejudiced by some of your close and jealous relatives on this matter. To them a Car has become a matter of significance, a matter for too much discussion. As a result your sister is now expecting a letter from me on account of this talk. I am not yet in a position to write to her until I hear from you. Therefore I shall thank you to reply to me at your earliest as to what your decision would be on all these matters so that I could write or see your loving sister and parents at home without delay and with a clear mind.

Now let me get to the Car you intend sending me down here. I have received a car list from a good friend. Of course those are good cars and the Motor Company dealing with them here belongs to my friend who gave me the list. But some of those cars are good for people who have made money. What WE must have is a hardy car which could run smoothly on little oil giving no problem, to cater to the foreign travel requirements of this small country. Therefore please do not send anything other than a Peugeot 404. When sending the car you must make it a point to keep some mark on the keys of the car to enable us to make the clearance at this end easy and also please keep in mind not to send any extra fittings along with the car such as radios, air conditioners etc. as those are being robbed at this end very thoroughly. Send every possible 'extra' but send them separately.

I would prefer the colour of the car to be yellow or blue as those colours might go along with the business name board I have in mind for my new Company.

Dear Mr Ranmuttu, in conclusion I wish to say that I am happy with your sister, father, mother and other brother but especially proud of a *man like you* irrespective of those other matters, which are yet not settled. Some day, before you die, you are sure to get good returns for all your efforts to help your dear family members.

Wishing you the best of luck in everything you may decide to venture into,

I remain

Yours truly intended to be,

Brother-in-law (L.S.D. Kalupane)

ANGUS GALDER

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## Under Zomba Plateau: The New Malawian Poetry

Above the quiet town of Zomba, till a few years ago Malawi's capital, now superseded in that role by Lilongwe, but still the seat of the small Chancellor College campus, one can sit, having walked up painfully or driven with much trepidation along a winding road beside precipices, in the agreeable garden of an inn. Birds flash brilliantly past. To the west, the sun is beginning to drop over Mozambique (having risen at the rear over Mozambique in the morning; Malawi's base is wedged in that country as in a cleft stick). Sipping a Carlsberg 'Green' lager, one may contemplate a landscape which, vast and apparently fertile, rolls towards distant blue hills. One way of describing it, or evading the task, would be to say that it's like many other East African landscapes, with hummocky hills and scant signs of habitation etched amid woodlands – hard for the untrained European eye to make full sense of, but heartliftingly airy and 'unspoilt'. But Zomba is not quite 'any African' plateau, nor the view from it quite like any other, because a school of writers centred on Chancellor College

has begun to give it significances, visionary, symbolic, satirical, in English verse.

There is no need to 'introduce' this verse, as Adrian Roscoe, Professor of English at Chancellor College, has already devoted fifteen pages or so to it in his recent book, *Ukuru's Fire*.<sup>1</sup> But perhaps another viewpoint isn't superfluous.

Malawi had writers in the 'first wave' of post-independence African fiction and poetry. There were poems by David Rubadiri in the earliest anthologies.<sup>2</sup> But since the mid-sixties he has been an exile from his homeland. The credit for beginning a 'second wave' of Malawian verse in English clearly belongs to a group of 'six students and two staff members of the English Department' at Chancellor College which first met 'one cool Thursday evening in 1970'.<sup>3</sup> This snowballed into the Writers Group which still meets weekly at the College, has seen as many as eighty present at one gathering and, when I was there for a month last November, regularly drew twenty to forty people to discuss poems and stories by members – it's not only the focus for a lively cyclostyld periodical, *The Mass*, which comments on the discussions and stirs up controversy generally, but it's also, clearly, a much-needed centre for intellectual argument on the campus. Its success reflects the absence of other facilities for debate.

An appealing anthology, *Mau*, appeared from a missionary press as early as 1971.<sup>4</sup> At that stage, Malawian verse must have seemed amply ready for a 'take-off' to match that of Ugandan and Kenyan poetry a few years before. Sadly, this hasn't quite happened. Just one individual Malawian poet has published a solo volume,<sup>5</sup> and a projected large-scale anthology has languished unprinted, in various stages, for years – so that Jack Mapanje, the editor, in desperation resorted to reviewing it prematurely in *Odi*, Malawi's one literary magazine.<sup>6</sup> One very impressive long poem by Steve Chimombo appeared in a Canadian journal in 1975.<sup>7</sup> I believe that the poems by Mapanje and by Felix Mnthali published in the first issue of *Kunapipi* were in fact the next to get into print outside Malawi – and *Odi* doesn't circulate widely, in or



outside Africa. So Soyinka can be forgiven (just) for ignoring the area in his *Poems of Black Africa*, which, with this amongst other imperfections, will unfortunately remain the standard anthology for some time yet.

Lack of aspiration doesn't explain the strange gap between 1971 promise and 1979 lack of evident fruits. The intellectual life of Chancellor College is remarkably energetic – the industry of staff and students puts those of certain other African campuses to shame. Nor is it an 'ivory tower'. Malawi is quite a small country, and besides the warm links which intellectuals maintain with their home villages (warmer by far, I would say, than in Kenya), the English Department remains in friendly touch with ex-students and other writers up and down the land. And the almost excessive perfectionism of Mapanje and Mnthali (I think these are the two best poets) is perhaps more symptom than cause of delay in publication – both constantly tinker with old poems as they might not feel able to do were the works in question already between stiff covers. Geographical isolation, enhanced since the guerilla campaign against Smith's Rhodesia stepped up, clearly accounts in some measure for delays. So does the fairly small size of the Malawian market for schoolbooks, which tends to stunt local publishing and to limit the interest of the multinationals – Heinemann, Longmans and OUP.

But the main problem has clearly been 'political'. Writing early in 1972, David Kerr and Ian White, lecturers at Chancellor and both, as poets themselves, much involved in the Writers Group, commented:

The Malawi Government Censorship Board is not obtrusive or tactless. It has rarely questioned any publications from the University, and one could well argue that its effects are felt more by the cinema-going expatriates than by the local community. Yet there is no doubt that its very existence is inhibiting to local writers. Direct political comment is automatically ruled out. So too, more seriously, is that direct involvement with the village majority which would be the hallmark of a mature local literature.<sup>8</sup>

They were thinking of novelists, dramatists and film-makers more than poets here. But as commonly happens in Africa, poets have worked in other genres as well, and have felt to the full the discouragement which censorship - more active, I think, now, than in 1972 - has inflicted on literary culture in general. A few plays, a volume of short stories, have appeared in a series from a local publisher.<sup>9</sup> But the representative anthology of poems has not seen the light, and the chances of publishing an individual 'slim volume' in Malawi seem non-existent. (Frank Chipasula's book, the one mentioned above, came out abroad, in Zambia.) The censorship seems to worry as much about 'sex' and 'bad grammar' as about 'politics', but this merely makes it all the more stultifying.

Happily, it now seems quite likely that a major multinational will produce either a volume by Mapanje, or an anthology, or even both. And meanwhile, the delays have not been all loss. While some promising writers (including, I suspect, Innocent Banda) may have failed to do themselves full justice for want of criticism from their peers abroad and from a public at home, Malawian verse has drawn certain strengths from its long submersion. Much of it has found a highly critical 'private' audience in the Writers Group, where intensity of interest has compensated for lack of numbers (and the numbers, as I've pointed out, haven't really been so very small). The poets themselves, and that immediate audience, are very conscious of allusions to each others' work, but this does not, in my experience, exclude the interested outsider who can't recognise the allusions. And if every line is charged with symbolism for those 'in the know', this doesn't mean that nothing gets across - indeed, I'd argue that it's in the very nature of certain valuable kinds of modern poetry that they 'suggest' rather than 'mean' and that what they 'suggest' depends on the individual reader.

Young Malawian poets in general seem to take more pains with 'expression' than their contemporaries in East Africa. The temptation to be strident and glib about obvious 'social' and 'political'

themes is one which they perforce must resist.

The combination of mythological with topical reference in Chimombo's 'Napolo' shows how a poem can gain in every way by indirection. The landscape of Zomba plateau, and the truly spectacular thunderstorms which assault the region in their season give a vivid natural context to the activities of a god who, man-like, brings both needed shocks and brutal destruction. The sequence does not suffer unduly from comparison with either Soyinka's 'Idanre' or Okigbo's 'Paths of Thunder'. Since it can be found in print without prohibitive difficulty, I won't quote it here, but will turn your attention to poets with less obtrusive but valuable virtues.

What I like best is the view of a valley village  
Looking down on it from above an opposite ridge  
Or coming up to it after a steep climb up horizon,  
I like to find people get out in the rainy season  
Or women sing mortar and pestle songs at dusk  
With the moon and stars lighting up their task.  
I like the sound of cicadas in wet grass at dawn  
And that of mosquitoes when the blinds are drawn  
And the light is out and darkness is all around  
And the cricket and the owl join forces aloud;  
Sometimes after a tiresome day up the nearby hill,  
I like the jumbled sounds of birds in an anthill  
As on a doomed funeral day when the quietude  
Of the procession bubbles my heart in solitude.

Lupenga Mphande, the author of that poem,<sup>10</sup> rarely sustains his lyrical observation so successfully. Perhaps even in this case, the word 'burbled' in the last line brings us close to bathos. But that word isn't an obvious or hackneyed one, it wasn't lightly chosen. Nor was the form of the poem, with its deceptively easy-looking and delightfully appropriate mixture of half-rhyme and near-rhyme with full rhyme. There is a great deal of pastoral poetry in English from Africa, and most of it is sentimental. By contrast, I find the combination here of warm affection for a familiar scene

with an intellectual's wistful detachment wholly convincing and directly touching. And this is very specifically a rural scene in hilly Malawi, not an imaginary African Eden.

Enoch Timpunza Mvula's 'Still Born'<sup>11</sup> is also very careful, very 'true' – and the sheer pain of the feeling which finds such adequate expression makes the poem, I think, a remarkable achievement:

She did not come just one night.  
She did not come just one month.  
But several nights and days and played  
with her diabetic mother.  
And like a feather blown  
by the August whirlwind  
disappeared each time  
her mother wanted to embrace her,  
'Where is my daughter  
which the nurse showed me?  
The daughter as beautiful  
as gooseberry flowers  
The daughter that brings  
a mother's sleepless agony  
... Why did you bury her  
Without me seeing her?  
Let's go to Zomba where  
she wanders like a motherless  
sheep on lion infested mountains'

I cannot bear to think  
of Gertrude's grief  
for our still born daughter.  
I am like a dumb man  
deep at night seeing  
his house on fire  
until it vanishes.

The poem is 'made' above all by the honest separation of the speaker's emotions from those of his wife, and by the simple power of certain images. But it wouldn't work without its well-judged

free verse rhythms; my ear can't fault them.

Anthony Nazombe is more ambitious, less wholly successful, in 'Initiation',<sup>12</sup> where beer drinkers

... learn from the earth  
that pestle must toil in the mortar  
for grain to ripen  
that clouds moan and crack  
to shed potent rain-drops.

But here too, as in other poems by this promising writer, I'm conscious of a well-developed sense of verse rhythm, a grudging determination not to waste words and not to fall into platitudes.

Felix Mnthali, Nazombe's colleague at Chancellor has such a strong grasp of syntax and rhythm that his poems can make an effect even when, as happens quite often, the choice of words is not particularly vivid and original. I think that 'Write', published in *Kanapipi*, is the best poem of his which I've seen. It illustrates a serious preoccupation which he has also expressed in prose:

That Africa has a great past is no longer a matter for debate – any more than that this past includes much that we would rather forget. What seems at issue is the role which that past is to play in the present and the future.<sup>13</sup>

'Write' embodies a dialectic between pre-literate past and literate future. I quote here from a revised version, though I'm not sure that the longer line here works as well as the shorter one in the earlier version:

And a voice said to me, 'Write!  
write on the sands on which we cavorted  
clad in the sands themselves and the breath of the lake;  
write and then erase all this in the waters of the lake  
because they were here before; they were here  
these waters ...'

The imperative 'Write!' is in ironic tension with the advice to obliterate everything written with the waters of Lake Malawi

which represent a past authenticity which historians (and poets) can never recapture. The synthesis of the dialectic seems to be presented in the last line, where the voice yet again says 'Write' - write anyway, write without sentimental illusion, write because the present and future demand it. But the poem will not let us forget the unalienated past in which man was 'clad in the sands', at one with the universe. At its best, as here, Mnthali's poetry combines rhetorical power with intellectual depth, dignity with an adequate dexterity.

Finally, a too-brief mention of the inimitable Jack Mapanje, yet another Chancellor College lecturer. 'Kabula Curio-Shop', also seen in *Kunapipi*, seems to me a little masterpiece, in which rhythm in the first stanza brilliantly enacts the process of making a 'curio' as the craftsman experiences it - then the second stanza, looking to the eye just like the first, gives the ear a wholly different rhythm to express the speaker's disgust at the waste of something achieved by such hard work. Though no other Mapanje poem represents his rhythmic gift so succinctly, they all share it in greater or less degree. It enables him to convey a complexly human sense of the world around him (and his poems are always very much about the world around him - he doesn't deal in dreams and abstractions). Wry and sharp, yet charitable and serious, companionable yet authoritative, Mapanje's voice seems to me wholly individual. Let's end with him sitting on Zomba plateau - 'For the Soldiers Quietly Back: April 1978'.<sup>14</sup> The poem's meaning is both private and public, and it needs must explain itself, but it does no harm to note here that *chambo* is an exceptionally delicious fish, found in the country's lakes, and staple fare for those who can afford it:

For goodness sake Sweetie, let's stop fretting  
About turbid top cockroaches that have no brains  
To penetrate even their own images. Let us  
For once when the prisoners are quietly home  
Enjoy the fruits of the evergreen landscape  
Of Zomba plateau. Let us walk up this Colossus  
When the winding avenues are littered with

The purple of jacarandas and the tongues of  
 Flames-of-the-forests. By the saw-mill let us  
 Pause to greet plateau boys buying their fresh  
 Vermilion strawberries and gorgeous grenadillas  
 And up Mulunguzi fountain we'll select a rock  
 To sit down on. And as the sparrows hop about  
 The tree-branches twittering, let us chew our  
*Chambo* sandwiches to the welling crests splattering  
 Nervously down the river. Or let us fondle our  
 Released hope hurtling down the turf in a strange  
 Joy today when the soldiers are quietly back.

## NOTES

1. Adrian Ruscov, *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East to South* (Cambridge UP, 1977), pp. 134-49.
2. See John Reed and Clive Wake, eds., *A Book of African Verse* (Heinemann EB, 1964), pp. 68-71; Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier, eds., *Modern Poetry from Africa* (revised edition, Penguin, 1966), pp. 221-2; and the larger selection of Rubadiri's work in Howard Sergeant, ed., *Poetry from Africa* (Pergamon, 1968), pp. 78-98.
3. Jack Mapanje, 'New Verse in Malawi', *Odi* 2:1 (April 1977), p. 28.
4. *Mac 39 Poems from Malawi* (Hetherwick Press, Blantyre).
5. Frank Chipasula, *Visions and Reflections* (Necnam, Zambia, 1973).
6. Mapanje, loc. cit., pp. 24-28.
7. Steve Chimombo, 'Napolo', *Malawi Review* 36 (October 1975), pp. 15-24.
8. David Kerr and Ian White, 'New Writing from Malawi' (unpublished Chancellor College paper, 17.2.1972).
9. See James Gibbs, ed., *9 Malawian Plays* (1976); Paul Zeleza, *Night of Darkness and other Stories* (1976); Steve Chimombo, *The Ratemaker* (play, 1978) — all published by Popular Publications (Limbe, Malawi).
10. Hitherto unpublished.
11. *Odi* 2:1 (April 1977), p. 30.
12. *Odi* 3:1 (June 1978), p. 44.
13. Felix Muthali, 'Nostalgia, Identity and Culture in Africa', *Outlook/lookout* (Dept. of English, Chancellor College, February 1975), p. 27.
14. Hitherto unpublished.

# Meja Mwangi

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## INTERVIEW

Bernth Lindfors interviewed Meja Mwangi when he was in Kenya in the autumn of 1978.

*When and why did you begin writing?*

I began writing around 1965 or 1966 when I was in secondary school at Nanyuki, my hometown. I wrote because I had a story to tell. That story, recently published under the title *Taste of Death*, dealt with the Mau Mau from the point of view of somebody who took part in the movement. It's not actually an historical novel, but it is based on historical events, on more or less a true story, and I thought that this experience ought to be shared with other Kenyans, particularly just after independence.

Mau Mau was a very important event in Kenya's history, and I still feel that so far not enough has been written about this crucial stage of our development. Unless it is written now, it will fade from our memory, so it is very necessary that it be recorded today by the generation that lived through it.

*You must have been quite young yourself during the Mau Mau era. Do you have personal recollections of it?*

Oh, yes. Everybody growing up at that time who wasn't a baby couldn't help getting involved in it. I don't mean involved in the action, the fighting or anything like that. You just couldn't help feeling the tension of the conflict between the forest fighters and the colonial government. Everyone was caught up in this big movement.



*Were you influenced at all by what others had written on this theme, particularly Ngugi?*

The only novel I had read on this subject before I started writing was Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child*. It encouraged me because it was closer to me than anything I had read before. The books I had read earlier were written by Europeans and were alien to me. But here was something that related to Kenyans as people. So the story *Taste of Death* was in a way encouraged by Ngugi's treatment of the Mau Mau theme in *Weep Not, Child*. I hadn't yet read *The River Between*.

*How much of the action in Taste of Death and in your other novel about Mau Mau, Carcase for Hounds, is based on actual events? How much is fact and how much fiction?*

A lot of the action in these stories is based on actual events, but I also use a lot of imagination to cover up for the facts which I don't have. The novels are a fairly accurate reflection of happenings here and there, and I did have specific people in mind when creating some of the characters. These were not people so great that they would be known by many others – not heroes like Dedan Kimathi or anybody like that. They were just people I knew through my own family. The story about the massacre, the ambush and so on in *Taste of Death* is a story I had heard discussed a long time ago by someone in my family who had just been released from detention.

*Taste of Death is a rather depressing story. A group of forest fighters is struggling for survival against overwhelming odds, and in the end they are exterminated. Why this kind of perspective on the Mau Mau? It looks as if the freedom fighters are defeated.*

Yes, it does, but in fact they are not. What I was trying to say

there is that these people never gave up, even though they were no match for the colonial forces. Let's face it: there is no way they could have won the war militarily. Yet, in spite of being outnumbered, outgunned and overwhelmed, they kept on fighting, hoping that something would come to their rescue, would help them out of the situation. Eventually, when Haraka, the hero of the novel, gets killed, his spirit symbolically lives on. This was the point I was trying to stress: the spirit of resistance lived on. The fact that one little band was wiped out did not mean that the movement died.

*In the late 1960s Chinua Achebe, who had previously felt that it was very important to write about the past, stated that the African author who ignored present-day realities and remained preoccupied with the past, would end up being totally irrelevant to his society. How do you feel about this?*

I don't consider myself as preoccupied with the past, as you can see from reading *Kill Me Quick*. It's just that I feel that there are certain things that still have got to be written. Mau Mau didn't happen in the so distant past anyway. And not enough has been written about it so that we can leave it behind and turn to other things. I just keep on tackling certain issues that have not been tackled so far. In fact, I think I may write a couple more books about the Mau Mau. In the meantime, I'll continue to write about the present.

*Why did you write Kill Me Quick?*

In the early 1970s a number of my friends had just finished secondary school and couldn't find jobs. I felt it was important to tell their story, to show their plight in the city. I don't think anybody here had written anything about such people yet – about the hopes and aspirations of one who comes out of school and discovers desperation in the city. I felt that the problems of these people ought to be brought to the attention of the rest of the society.

*I understand you have a new novel coming out shortly called Going Down River Road. What is this about?*

It also deals with contemporary urban problems. It's about the life of construction labourers in Nairobi. This again is a story that hasn't been told yet. Nobody to my knowledge has tried to explore in depth the lot of the ordinary labourer in our society. I have known and lived among such people. The story is based on personal observations.

The same is true of the quarry episode in *Kill Me Quick*. That's based to some extent on personal experience too. I lived for about a year next to a quarry.

*What are you writing now?*

I am working on a number of novels simultaneously. I haven't decided which one to finish first. One of them called *The Cockroach Dance* is more like *Kill Me Quick* and *Going Down River Road* than like my Mau Mau novels. It examines the life of one person in our society who has got a job he doesn't like.

Another one I am working on presents the case of a young man who goes abroad to study and is faced with a choice between coming back home and staying where he is. He examines all the arguments for and against and eventually makes his decision. When I was in the United States, I met a lot of East Africans on my travels through San Francisco, Washington and Chicago. As we talked, I realized that there was a great need to tell their sad story. I hope to go back and learn more about this situation before finishing this novel.

*Is it true that you are supporting yourself entirely by your writing?*

Yes.

*I have noticed that you have written a lot of short stories for local magazines. Do such publications pay well enough to sustain a professional writer here?*

Not really. There are too few of them, and they do not pay much for stories. *Jot Magazine*, *Drum*, *Trust*, and a new Nairobi journal called *Umma* buy stories, but the newspapers here never do, and it's very difficult for us to sell short stories in Europe or America. There aren't enough outlets for short fiction here.

*Do literary competitions tend to encourage writing here? Ngugi, for example, wrote **The River Between** for a competition organised by the East African Literature Bureau in the early 1960s. Has the recent establishment of the Kenyatta Prize for Literature, which you won in 1973 for **Kill McQuick**, stimulated creative writing in Kenya?*

Yes, these prizes have had some effect, but again there are not enough of them. The only regular award is the Kenyatta Prize which is awarded each year for the best literary work in English and in Swahili. Maybe that has encouraged some writers, but it is rare that one writes with an award in mind.

*What do you think motivates someone in East Africa to begin writing?*

In my own case, as I said earlier, it was the urge to tell a particular story, and after that one was told, there were so many others to tell. The ideas just keep coming. There are certain ideas you want to discuss or bring to life in order to share them with your society. This desire to say something socially meaningful might motivate people to write.

*Do you think the financial motive is very strong among new writers, young writers?*

No, I don't think so. I can't think of anyone who got started that way. There are no great financial gains to be made from writing. Publishers pay so badly that you can't write for the money.

I have been trying to write full-time so that I can write more freely and can spend as much time as I need on a book. I want to

be able to devote myself entirely to writing, but of course I've got to eat and pay the rent, too, like anyone else. It can be a bit tricky at times.

If writing paid, I think we would have a lot more and better writers in East Africa. We have a lot of talented young people at the university, some of whom, I know, would like to do more writing but they can't because they have to work for a living. So literary development here tends to progress slowly.

*What about radio and television? Do they provide an outlet for writers?*

Yes and no. They sometimes broadcast plays, but writing and producing the stories is so tedious and pays so badly that there is no motivation there either. If you did do it, it would be because you wanted to write, not because you wanted to make money out of it. There is so much you have to give to such a production. The cast needs to be recruited, organized, directed, and also paid, and the whole business takes so much time and energy that afterwards you feel it wasn't worth the trouble.

*When you started writing, there was very little literature being produced in English by East Africans. Today there is a great deal. What do you think accounts for this change?*

I suppose one of the main reasons is that there are now more publishing houses so more people can get published. In the past some publishers were either too choosy or didn't publish fiction. Today there are more publishers, and the market for fiction is rising because there are a lot more readers able to read in English.

Another reason for the change is that people have realized that there is real talent right here in East Africa. We have received a lot more encouragement than in the past.

*What kind of audience is reading this new literature?*

Well, we do not yet have a reading tradition here. It's just developing. People are now beginning to buy books to read for pleasure. As it happens, the readers are mainly those people who can afford books; they are secondary school leavers and university graduates who are working and still like to read.

*There seems to be a lot of popular literature emerging in East Africa today. What do you think explains this phenomenon?*

Before this new type of writing began to emerge, readers here were hooked on European paperback thrillers – the James Bond kind of writing. Now East Africans have started publishing thrillers of their own, with local settings and local content. These appeal more to East African readers than Western paperbacks because they can relate to them easily. The demand for this kind of literature encourages writers to produce more of it. These books are absorbing part of a market that already existed, but unfortunately they are priced higher than most of the European paperbacks so they haven't quite caught up with the market yet.

*Do you think this is the direction in which East African writing is moving? Is there likely to be more of this kind of writing and less of the kind that deals with local historical events – the Mau Mau novels, for instance?*

Yes, but eventually things will even out. The popular writing can't go on and on. I mean, one can only write so much on a certain subject before the readers tire and eventually return to the more serious literature. The excitement caused by the emerging popular writing should soon settle down. There is a great future for serious writing here.

*Would people be as likely to pick up a novel by Ngugi as one by, say, David Maillu?*

That's a tricky question to answer. A lot of people who read today do not care very much for the value of the literature. It's mainly a matter of entertainment for them, and they might not understand Ngugi's style or content. Most of them are more likely to pick up a book by Maillu than one by Ngugi. The reading public has not developed to the stage where readers will carefully discriminate between serious and light reading.

*Which writers have been the most popular in East Africa?*

Maillu is the most popular. He's also the most successful since he manages to keep his publishing company going. Ngugi is very well known and respected but he appeals more to the academic mind than to the ordinary reader. I can't think of anybody else except Charles Mangua, whose novel *Son of Woman* was at one time extremely popular. Another important writer in East Africa has been Okot p'Bitek, but his very popular *Song of Lawino* is different from the works of Maillu and Mangua because there is more meaning to it. Some of these popular works have no message at all. They are simply words, words, words.

*Do you think these popular works perform any kind of useful social function?*

Only insofar as they attract bigger readership and may thus instill the reading habit in many more people. As I said earlier, there's no reading tradition in our society. You actually come across people who boast they haven't read one novel since they failed their literature exam ten or more years ago. One hopes that these readers of popular works will eventually graduate to reading more serious literature as the reading experience matures.

*Do you think these books offer an accurate reflection of life in the city?*

Yes, partially. But sometimes they are overdramatized to such an extent that they lose reality. They become completely distorted. Young people reading them may get the wrong impressions of life

in the city.

*Have you ever been tempted to write this kind of literature?*

Never. It seems very easy to do, especially if one uses a free poetic form, but I feel I can't do it. I like to develop a serious story in prose. I may try my hand at another play some day, but I want to feel completely comfortable with my prose writing before I embark on that.

I feel that the moral is far more important in writing than the entertainment. Of course, the two should go together if the story is to be considered well done. A moral shouldn't spoil a story but should give it greater value. That's the kind of story I want to write.

## Kofi Awoonor

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### INTERVIEW

The University of Texas, Austin, 31 January 1978. Interview conducted, transcribed and edited by Ian H. Munro, Department of English, William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri, and Wayne Kamin, Department of English, The University of Texas at Austin.

*In a speech a decade ago in Stockholm, Wole Soyinka argued that the African writer had failed to respond to the 'political moment' of his society, because he has been 'without vision'. Do you feel that this situation, if Soyinka's assessment was correct, has changed over the past decade?*



We are now getting to the eye of the storm; the Independence movement is over and done with. Wole had seen at close quarters the deterioration of the political process in Nigeria. He was making the statement in 1967; in 1965 there was the great crisis in the Western region, with Akintola and so on, and Wole addressed himself to this particular state of confusion through plays like *Before the Blackout*. He more or less placed himself in confrontation with that situation, more so than any other writer anywhere in Africa at that particular time where situations had not deteriorated as much as they had in Nigeria. Nigeria was more critical, much more exaggerated because of its peculiar, volatile context and size.

The experimentations in Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah and subsequently in Guinea and the failures they quickly ended in showed the weakness of taking immediate ideological positions in Africa without the creation of what I would call the infrastructures for building a socialist base. I know the situation in Ghana best, and we, the writers, were not overly concerned with the process, we were not very much involved in the process of this construction and indulged in the rearguard thing. The great themes were the themes of the clash of cultures, which everybody flogged to death. But the context has changed, with Biafra, with commitments by the writers and a kind of immediate situation of development whether one agrees with it or not. The example of Okigbo, a very eloquent example, became dramatized in the condition of Wole Soyinka when he was arrested by the Federal Government.

We are now confronting the question of the failure of the political dreams and the aftermath of that failure, where the details of the questions of freedom and liberty and human dignity and equity are now obvious for us to address ourselves to in literature whilst for the South Africans, of course, one may say that this is postponed. After liberation then they will begin that real human question, sans race. We are not talking about race. We are talking about people dying in jail in Kenya or Ghana, or being clubbed in

the streets of Accra by people who are very identifiable. They are one of us. They are brothers.

That is where real literature begins, this is my contention. The real writing has begun north of the Zambezi in the post-Independence era. We have exhausted the question of how sad we are because we are kin and look at what they reduce us to in spirit, whimpering inertia, dribbling at the mouth and saying, 'Oh, things have fallen apart!' That is over. Like Négritude before it, it established a dialogue. Now we have entered a new period of monologue, in which the self-search is something that has to be made.

I invest the total failure of all the experiments in Africa, in all the different parts of Africa, with the lack of domestication of the so-called intelligentsia. The African intelligentsia, unlike its counterpart in, say China or Japan, has not yet domesticated itself, has not yet transferred its intellectual scope and grasp of things into real terms of its own and its society's existence and the sort of dynamics that organize that society. I believe that social transformations, the total changes of political and economic arrangements, have always been carried out by the intelligentsia and they become the storehouse because they possess the knowledge. That knowledge, of course, cannot be utilized if their class interests do not become interchangeable with, exchange with, the larger mass of the people. And when these two class interests coincide then revolutions come about. We have not yet done the critical thinking on whether the general failure of the African intelligentsia who have been produced by Western contact over the past hundred years is that it has not really done any serious thinking.

But I find the kind of frenetic dash into the rural country to pick up folk tales rather backward glancing and almost reactionary in the political sense, because it becomes a very artificial process. The member of the intelligentsia who does this acquires material he has picked up without understanding, and without applying his own power of *transforming* that particular aesthetic form into an instrument of change. The people in the village have told us

stories and told them over and over again, but the story doesn't stop there. This is where I see the writer as mythmaker, accepting the fact that the mythmaking process itself is a dynamic process. Soyinka does that in *The Interpreters*, but what is wrought there is perhaps a personal, agonized kind of vision. It has not been transferred into the larger issues of the society in the way in which perhaps Alejo Carpentier does in *The Lost Steps* or Garcia Marquez in *A Hundred Years of Solitude*.

The privileged position that I occupy as an educated person, the exposure I've had (and I'm not talking personally about myself but about intellectuals in general) presupposes a greater degree of responsibility in the business of social transformation than just understanding what the people want, because I suspect that people may not actually know what they want. For example, the Buganda, who are or have been conditioned by autocracy. Now if they do not have a reference so far as the word 'freedom' is concerned then my duty, as someone who has had a greater access to a greater amount of experience exterior to his own limited scope, is to do much more than just say, 'What does he want and I will try to give it to him'.

It seems to me as if the kind of peculiarity which emerges in the context of the African writer when you place him in comparison to other writers from other places, the American writer for example, is defined by the kind of history through which he has come and by the relentless need to expend energy in order to forge a viable *alternative* society to the one that has somehow, by the very nature of colonialism, survived. I see him here in the same context as writers in Franco's Spain or the writers who are still involved in the struggle for so-called 'human rights' in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, in Chile and so on. His historical conditions dictate a certain urgency which is intensified by the deterioration of the hasty political arrangements within which as a writer, mythmaker or visionary he is expected to function. And I think this is where the question becomes more urgent so far as he's concerned than perhaps in the case of other writers, say American

or British writers, who are not confronting this human dilemma as artists.

*One problem in the development of African writing has been the dominance of foreign critics and presses. Are they still controlling the direction that African literature might take in the future?*

Your question brings up a good point about theme and subject matter, because in the earlier writing we tended to be addressing the 'Other'. Most of the early writers did confess that if they were addressing the African they were also addressing the European who might read the story. And this is very much part of the question of the clash of cultures. As we go beyond that question we are coming to themes that are more and more directed towards the inner personality of that African condition. So therefore there is no need to talk to the Other, the European reader and critic. Also more and more Africans are reading African writing; it's getting into the schools, but of course not to the exclusion of the outside reader who is also being brought in out of his world into a new reality, the world of African literature. In the schools of America the subject has received some real attention. The African writer has by that process been brought into a community of world writing and world concern and therefore his particular problems have been universalized and placed within a wider world context.

So from the pure point of view of the politics of publishing the question is fairly irrelevant whether an African writer gets published in London or in Lagos. But the sociology of the writing will demand that perhaps more work should be done in African publishing in Africa itself than has been done so far, even if this requires government support.

The African Literature Bureau of Ghana has done a tremendous amount of publishing in the local languages, and also Ghana State Publishing, which began with so-called 'bread and butter' things but is slowly beginning to do the creative work. It has a

terrible problem with bureaucracy. People have complained of sending manuscripts there, and they have been accepted three years after. When they are published there have been very bad proofreaders, some of them just boys. But the consciousness is there, although one had hoped for it to be liberated from the bureaucracy. I personally would like very much to go into publishing just for the sheer thrill of finding new manuscripts and publishing and launching them. I don't know about the economics of it!

*Is the recent arrest of Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Kenya a sign that the African writer will be subject to increased censorship and even imprisonment for his work? (Ngugi wa Thiong'o was under arrest at the time of this interview. Ed.).*

In a weekly review from Nairobi there was another review of the play which Ngugi co-authored and which had landed him in jail. I haven't seen the play, but just from the evidence that this man produces the critique was being made of the play that Ngugi attacks the Christian religion and views it as an original kind of evil. The critic was saying this is wrong, because human institutions of any kind, including Christianity, cannot, *per se*, be charged with being based on evil. I don't know whether this is what Ngugi said in this play, but he could be angering more than just the church authorities. He could be angering the people who uphold the moral position of religion in society, and could also be accused of being an atheist.

In Ghana, the ruling body has at its disposal, and I'm sure it is true of Nigeria, a lot of very highly trained and educated people. I remember when I appeared before a board of investigators that was interviewing me, everybody there confessed to having read my novel. Then they started a quiz. The chairman was a graduate of Legon and had taken advanced degrees at the University of Bordeaux.

What I'm saying is that in Ghana the people who do the hatch-

et work, the dirty backroom work, as in many of the efficient totalitarian regimes the world has known, are becoming very well trained. And when the people upstairs themselves have become very efficient and very highly trained so will the systems of repression.

But to return to Ngugi. His preoccupations or ideology aren't the subjects of his novel, *Petals of Blood*, nor of his play. The play does not set itself up to promulgate an ideological doctrine or position, but can be read or seen as such by those who are unalterably opposed to any form of socialism in Kenya. Disguise, irony, paradox have always been literary instruments, and I don't think they will vanish. In the name of being bold and attacking the problem headlong, I think there is still an intrinsic quality in the use of disguise and paradox. We have to accept that as part and parcel of the aesthetics of all literature.

The references can be very direct and obvious. When I was doing my own field work on folk tales an old man told me a story of the deer-woman and the hunter. He went into the bush and saw this beautiful deer. As he aimed, the deer turned around and looked at him, and he said 'Oh, you are so beautiful. I wish I had a woman like you'. And the deer said, 'If I turn into a woman will you marry me?' He said, 'Yes'. She said, 'You wouldn't insult me about when I was a deer?' He said, 'No'.

So the pact was made, and the hunter married her. She turned into a beautiful woman. He brought her home and they lived very happily until the hunter married another wife to whom he secretly told the secret of this woman's real origin. A fight broke out one day, and the other woman insulted her deer origin. So she went into the rafters of the building, took down her deer outfit, and as she went out was singing a song.

The hunter came back and said, 'Where is my wife?' The other woman told him she had gone to the bush, and he rushed back into the bush and saw the deer up on the hill. But she had left her children behind. They are part of the human family.

And the old man said to me, 'Well you know, so-and-so's family

is descended from that deer woman. But don't say it, because they don't like to be reminded of that'. Here reality and fiction have become one. There is nothing here that we can refer to as a social sanction; it's a reinforcing story about the relations between man and the animals. A writer can use the same degrees of subtlety, the same ingredients of subtlety that are available in as complex a structure as the folk tale.

SVEN POULSEN

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## The Press in Nigeria

In most books and surveys on Africa and African affairs the press is seldom mentioned. Now and then the Nigerian or the South African press is briefly touched upon as possible exceptions from the general rule that the African press is unimportant quantitatively and qualitatively.

In the whole of Africa there were in 1976 only 190 daily newspapers having a total circulation of six million copies. This gives Africa an average of 14 copies per 1,000 inhabitants against a World average of 130 per 1,000 (Western Europe 243 per 1,000).<sup>1</sup>

From a Western point of view the quality of the press is determined by its independence, objectivity and its right to criticise authority. Most Westerners favour the principle of a free press. There is a great difference between a free press and the state-owned presses of the communist powers, which are often the mouthpieces of the government.

In the Third World we can distinguish crudely between three categories of newspapers.

1) Countries with reactionary or even fascist governments

where the press is censored so that any expression of liberal or socialist opposition is completely eradicated.

2) Countries with a more or less socialist policy where the government-controlled press is used for propaganda and educational purposes. In Tanzania for example the press serves a useful function in the development process.

3) Countries which take as their model Western liberal democracies. Even here, political freedom is restricted and often interrupted. The government declares a state of emergency or the military takes over, stating its intention to restore parliamentary rule in the not too distant future.

An American institute in 1978 tried to express the various nations' respect for political freedom by means of a 'Political Freedom Index'.<sup>2</sup> The result of course is highly questionable but may give a comparative evaluation from a rather extreme liberal point of view. With the exception of Senegal and Botswana the score for Nigeria was higher than for any other African nation. In a country under military rule, highly bureaucratic and rather corrupt, this may be partly explained by the planned transition to civil rule in 1979, partly by the comparative freedom of the Nigerian press.

Fighting increasing restrictions newspapers and periodicals in Nigeria have succeeded in maintaining a running debate on matters of public interest during the last fifty years, before and after independence in 1960. The press compares favourably with the press in most developing countries and is probably the freest press in Africa. In fact, in many ways it has taken the place of an opposition to the government.

Throughout colonial times in most of Africa newspapers were written for and read by the whites and supported colonial rule. Kenya has inherited from colonial times an entertaining, well-written press, which has however consistently supported the rulers, be they white or black. In colonial Nigeria there were few whites but in comparison with East Africa a large number of educated Africans. Weekly or fortnightly newspapers had existed in Lagos for about fifty years when, after the first World War,



criticism of colonial rule was reflected in the local press. Dominion status for Nigeria was mentioned as a possibility for the distant future. At that time this attitude was unheard of in most 'black' African colonies.

After his return from studying in the USA and a stay at the Gold Coast Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1937 started the crusading nationalist newspaper *West African Pilot* in Lagos. In the following years he founded the 'Zik Group of Newspapers' in various towns in Nigeria. 'In view of the primitive system of transportation in the country ... I thought that a group of newspapers published at strategic centres would minimize the problems of distribution', Azikiwe writes in his memoirs.<sup>5</sup> Azikiwe put down 'Twelve Cardinal Rules' for his journalists, a mixture of ethical rules and practical advice well known to Western journalists: 'Be fair. We shall not suppress the truth for fear of hurting feelings or losing revenue. Be careful in crime reporting ... Get names right ... Beware of seekers after free publicity ... Beware of your own prejudices ... Don't offend races, tribes, nationalities, religions ... Don't promise to suppress any news story ... Keep your hands clean' etc. (p. 308). 'During my sixteen years service I was able to give theoretical and practical training in journalism to over sixty of the most eminent journalists and leaders of the country', he writes (p. 433). Azikiwe's interest was not confined to journalism alone but also to the many technical problems connected with newspaper production in a non-industrial society.

One of the main problems for Nigeria was that too many talented and educated young Nigerians made their career in the public or service sector as lawyers, politicians etc. whilst there was, and still is, a fatal lack of agriculturalists, engineers and industrialists. This was in fact what Azikiwe did turning from clever industrial manager to politician.

In the most populous nation of Africa torn by rivalries between regions, parties, traditional rulers, religious and ethnic groups and with increasing class-distinctions the journalists were now faced with the task of reporting public affairs objectively and

keeping democratic debate alive in a situation where many of the new politicians were men of the type described by Achebe in his novel *A Man of the People*. Nearly all the mainly private-owned newspapers soon clashed with the government. In 1961 the Federal Government founded its own newspapers *The Morning Post* and *Sunday Post* and in 1964 increased its control by passing The Newspaper Amendment Act which extended official control to the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. In that year Nigeria also produced its first university graduates in journalism from a new college in Ibadan. Unfortunately many of the university-trained journalists proved typical careerists and found posts in the new, officially sponsored newspapers, radio and television stations. Yet in spite of this infusion of university graduates and financial grants the two state-owned papers could not compete with the privately owned presses and folded up their operations in 1976 with a circulation of less than 10,000 copies.

In the long run, however, state-ownership of the successful private press could not be avoided. The military came to power 1966 and declared a state of emergency, tightening the screws on the press. The partitioning of Nigeria into twelve states in 1967 and nineteen in 1976 created a wish for new state-governments to found their own state-controlled papers. When the Federal Government in 1976 acquired sixty per cent of the shares in the large Daily Times Group of newspapers the majority of the presses became state-owned. By that time *The Daily Times* sold at least 150,000 copies a day while the Sunday edition, *The Sunday Times*, had reached a circulation of 500,000 copies.<sup>4</sup> The situation of the press in the 1970s was aptly described by Alhaji Babatunde Jose, chairman of *The Daily Times*, in a speech given in 1972:

Many well-meaning people have accused Nigerian journalists and newspapers of being dull, timid, spineless and mealy-mouthed. They say we cannot 'publish and be damned'. They forget that apart from the laws of defamation and sedition ... there are other formidable constraints on press freedom in Nigeria. Under the state of emergency all constitutional rights ceased to exist ... The armed forces rule by decrees. It has been made an offence to

publish any matter 'which by reason of dramatization or other defects in the manner of its presentation is likely to cause public alarm or industrial unrest'. In the absence of a democratically elected parliament the newspapers have found themselves playing the role of a deliberative assembly reflecting the feelings of the people, their peccadilloes, their likes and dislikes of government policies and actions and the conduct of the people, who run the government. In consequence almost every editor of any important newspaper including those owned by governments has seen the inside of a police cell or army orderly room. The result is that journalists now have to impose self-censorship on what they write and in effect what they tell the public in news and views... Of course in Nigeria as in other African countries journalists and newspapers have a responsibility to help in nation building and foster national unity.<sup>3</sup>

Jose's comment about editors seeing the inside of a police cell was not an exaggeration. In 1972, the news editor of *The Daily Times* was detained for a month after writing an article on a long-delayed selection of a new principle for Ibadan Polytechnic. The article was entitled 'Show of Power over Ibadan Polytechnic', and was accompanied by a photograph of Brigadier Rotomi, the Western State Governor.<sup>4</sup>

Thousands of critical articles, however, have been published without any consequences as long as the journalists avoided attacking certain important persons, and there have been few, if any, instances of direct censorship before publishing. On the whole the press has been more fortunate than that of most other countries under military dictatorship. In many ways the Federal Commissioner for Information was right when he said during a special press briefing in Lagos 9 May 1978 that the Government had not introduced press censorship and did not intend to do so. The danger in 1979 seems to be that the Constitutional Drafting Committee preparing transition to civil rule has made provisions for an Executive President wielding enormous power with probably inadequate guarantees for the unfettered functioning of the press.

Nigeria of the 1970s has developed into a nation dominated by 'the frantic grab of the few well-placed for easy wealth'.<sup>5</sup> In a

series of articles the press has emphasized that the Government, because of the present oil-wealth, has been a victim of the 'illusion of affluence' and has lavishly spread this affluence through the wrong channels, not doing enough to stimulate agriculture, infrastructure and education. The press has repeatedly advised the Government to 'recall people from the shopping spree' and to ban the increasing import of luxury goods. The question 'Is Oil a Blessing or a Curse?' has been raised in large headlines, and the curse aspect has been emphasized. Thus *The Nigerian Business Times* wrote (29 March 1977):

The fact remains that in spite of the so-called oil boom and the rapid growth of the Gross Domestic Product, per capita income in Nigeria is still lower than in many other countries in West Africa. What this calls for is a recognition by everyone that the good fortune from oil, which is a wasting asset, is an opportunity to improve the well-being of the entire population on a more permanent basis and not a surplus to be squandered by the few who are in a position to do so.

This shows the concern of a responsible press for the underprivileged majority and how close it goes to the bone in its criticism of the privileged few in Nigeria. The latter group are formidable enemies but the Nigerian press shows no sign of weakening. In a statement in *The Daily Times*, 28 April 1978 it emphasized it would continue to fight:

Whatever kind of junta would rule the nation after 1979, be that government military or civilian, elected or unelected, parliamentary or presidential, the press shall assert its right to freedom.

## NOTES:

1. UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1976.
2. *Time*, 13 March 1978, pp. 14-15.
3. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *My Odyssey* (London, 1970), p. 301. Further references will be to this edition and will be included in the text.

4. *Africa* No. 85, September 1978, p. 78.
5. *Africa Contemporary Record* 1972-73, p. C 181.
6. *Ibid.*, p. B 698.
7. Richard A. Josephs, 'Affluence and Underdevelopment: The Nigerian Experience' in *Journal of Modern African Studies* 1978, No 2, p. 238.

## Mike Jenkins

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### SUMMER HAS LIED

Summer has lied this year –  
swallows seem caught  
in their own hurricanes,  
the wood's green is heavier  
than the sky, the buds are shy  
to the skinning breeze.

Still, I feel holiday here  
in the gap between one decision and another.  
The paddle-steamers chugging back and fore  
full of children who buccaneer  
about the deck, and take Steep Holme  
back with them, to build a cottage upon  
in their heads before sleeping.

A case full of punched tickets  
and the kiss of a neighbour  
worn on my lapel. Weston stretched and gleaming  
like a necklace from a distance.

Towards the pier, willing my eyes  
to be binoculars – they are there  
more vivid now: his walking-stick raised  
in a ritual greeting, she in a pink dress  
and straw hat like a Methodist outing.

We will meet and kiss. 'A wet one'  
she'll say and giggle, little girl  
kissing for the first time at a party –  
and he, perhaps, will sniff the beer  
but save the sermon till I'm out of hearing.

She will shuffle along like a female Chaplin  
and he'll watch his feet in case  
he trips over a smile, enquiring  
about the happiness of family members.  
Everyone's misery I can finger,  
I feel older than them and sourer.

Summer has lied to me –  
I must open an ear for birdsong –  
dead flies litter my head for sweeping.  
It seems that every year  
I'll make that journey to Weston,  
with the wake of swallow's tail  
behind the steamer, to furnish  
their upstairs flat, to sit spoilt  
as they worry around the kitchen.

## Margaret Laurence's Attempt at Audio-Visual Fiction

After the publication of *The Fire-Dwellers* in 1969 Margaret Laurence stated:

At the moment, I have the same feeling as I did when I knew I had finished writing about Africa. I've gone as far as I personally can go, in the area in which I've lived for the past three novels. A change of direction would appear to be indicated. I have a halfway hunch where I want to go, but I don't know how to get there, or what will be there if I do. Maybe I'll strike it lucky and find the right compass, or maybe I won't.<sup>1</sup>

Margaret Laurence later reiterated her concern with new directions. In an unpublished lecture she acknowledged the influence watching television has had on her and said:

What I want to get is the effect of voices and pictures – just voices and pictures. I became obsessed with this notion, as it seemed to convey the quality of the lives I wanted to get across. It was only much later that I realized that 'voices and pictures' is only another – and to my mind, better way of saying 'audio-visual'.<sup>2</sup>

Already incipient in *A Jest of God*, the change in direction really occurs in *The Fire-Dwellers*. Her African short stories and novels are characterized by a conventional narrative technique. *The Stone Angel* also develops along traditional lines except that, compared with the previous novels, the use of strictly chronological flashbacks throughout the book represents a slight innovation. The first crack appears in *A Jest of God*, grows wider in *The Fire-Dwellers* and then in *The Diviners* the traditional mold of the novel finally bursts. Gradually we see Margaret Laurence working to-

wards a novel form in which the 'showing' will prevail over the 'telling', a novel less meant to be 'read' than 'seen' or 'heard' by its receiver, who, accordingly, will be less of a 'lecteur', a reader-interpreter than a 'liseur', a reader acting both as a listener and spectator.

How does Margaret Laurence manage to convey both 'voices and pictures' through the sheer medium of the printed word, to 'show' the story most vividly?

She makes her fictional language as visual and sonorous as possible. In her last three novels the visual element is to be found at two different levels. At a first level – the typographical level – it represents all that contributes to the visual variety of the printed page. The dashes in *A Jest of God* are meant to mark the change of voice, the shift from the first to the third person, the conversion of the heroine-narrator into a narrator-observer. In *The Fire-Dwellers* they introduce the innermost thoughts of the central character, Stacey. These visual reference marks, however, are missing from *The Diviners*. The italics indicate the interior monologues of Morag, the heroine of *The Diviners* and Stacey's flights into an imaginary world. Stacey's flashbacks are indented on the page. News from radio and TV stand out in capital letters in *The Fire-Dwellers*, the text of *The Diviners* is interspersed with songs, catalogues printed in various types. Like some poets Margaret Laurence is fond of typographical effects. The presentation of *The Diviners* breaks with the traditional continuity of form; the chapters are divided into sequences ('snapshot', 'memorybank movie') with the latter being sometimes cut up into shorter sequences entitled 'inner film', this deliberate formal anarchy reminds one of *U.S.A.* by Dos Passós. Margaret Laurence even thought how marvellous it would be to write a novel, newspaper style, by setting up the book in four columns so as to show everything going on simultaneously as in life; a quadruple presentation which would unfortunately require four sets of eyes.<sup>3</sup>

The visual quality of the novel, at a second level – that of the narrative – is created by the use of the present tense and the third



person as well as by cinematic processes.

The present tense is commonly employed by the mass media, radio and television in particular, as the most adequate tense for reporting, because by reducing the distance between the report and its receiver the latter is given an impression of immediacy. *A Jest of God* and *The Fire-Dwellers* are written exclusively in the present tense; whereas in *The Dishwashers* there is a constant shifting from the present to the past and vice versa, with the switching from one to the other producing, so to speak, a stereoscopic vision of things. The inner organization of *The Dishwashers* is complex due to the interlocking of the different narratives; there are, effectively, three narrative levels. At a first level – that of the narration in the past (the tense favoured by traditional fiction) – we find the heroine, busy working on her fifth novel, having trouble to cope with her situation as a writer, a wife (she is divorced), a mother (Pique, the eighteen year old daughter she had from the Métis Jules Tonnerre, is a constant worry for her). At the second level and parallel to the first narrative, in the sequences entitled 'Memorybank Movie', is unfolded the story of Morag Gunn since her parents' death when she was still a child, up to the time of the narration of the novel. Within these films a 'third degree' narrative is inserted, including both the story of the Gunn Clan told to young Morag by the man who has adopted her, and the legend of the Tonnerres, reported by one member of the Métis family. This 'méta-méta' narrative is written in the past tense, the preterite significantly expressing here 'une sortie de passé sans âge', as critic Gérard Genette would put it.

The film, in the present tense, of Morag's previous life is introduced into the past of the first narrative as a sort of immediate report. Somehow the writer, in her quest for time lost, thus visualizes the moving, 'present' film of her life, which stands out against a background of legends fixed in the past.

The third person also gives the illusion of presence and immediacy; *The Fire-Dwellers* is written in the third person (and in the present tense); it is quite appropriately used in the sequences of

the 'film' in *The Disinners*. As regards the voice the same phenomenon as in the case of time occurs; namely an occasional shifting from the 'I' to the 'she', as, for instance, in *A Jest of God*. No question here, on the part of the writer, as with some contemporary novelists, of a deliberate intention of confusing the reader by intermingling narrator and character; nor does the relation between the narrator and his character ever tend to fluctuate. What we have here is a deliberate shifting as the author pretends to take the camera and replaces the somewhat distant, introspective 'I' by the third person. We find ourselves confined to the closed, nearly autistic world of Rachel Cameron. Through her eyes alone are we permitted to see everything: first herself, an unmarried primary-school teacher, threatened by the crisis of middle-age and haunted by a crippling feeling of frustration, the small town of Manawaka, her difficult cohabitation with a possessive mother, then her brief but sterile encounter with Nick, the son of Ukrainian immigrants during one summer of the 60s. Eight times we escape from the introspective cage in which Rachel has kept us imprisoned from the start; eight escapes duly indicated by dashes. These appear suddenly in the second half of the novel. How can we explain this unexpected diversion in the long monologue of the heroine? One may suppose that the task she has set herself – that of minutely reconstituting the facts – quite naturally leads Rachel to establish a distance, to put herself in the position of an observer so as to see and make us see better. She is induced to imagine little living pictures in which she may somehow watch herself playing a part, the very part she has undertaken to 'show' us. Thus Rachel and the actors of her drama appear briefly, in close-ups. Two passages that are precisely significant because they are presented as real pictures will illustrate the point. Searching her memory for the person who one day had addressed her with 'honey' and not with 'darling', as Nick was wont to do, she finds again the man, one travelling salesman:

Maybe it was the salesman who travelled in embalming fluid. Do that part over again.

– He makes a slightly flippant thing of it, but the reality is obvious to her, the tension of him, the sureness that hides some unsureness.<sup>4</sup>

Later on she evokes the scene in the kitchen of Nick's parents when the intrusion of Jago, his brother, makes her so uncomfortable that she leaves:

I could have handled the situation differently. It would have been easy. I see that now.

– They are sitting in the kitchen, the two of them, drinking coffee with rum. They don't need to talk. They are quite happy, just like this. The boots outside the back door make a scuffling noise – someone wiping his feet before coming in the house... (p. 160)

As on a screen, close-ups and multiplicity of plans enable the novelist to render certain details of plot and character particularly vivid. That the image proper is of paramount importance to her is evidenced in her quite uncommon use of the photo at the beginning of *The Diviners*. The photo here serves, so to speak, as a trigger to the memory of Morag as she is busy visualizing her past. So the first chapter contains a series of six sequences entitled 'snapshot'; in these are shown, one by one, in strictly chronological order, the six photographs of her early childhood she has retrieved from a drawer. Photo number 3:

The child, three years old, is standing behind the heavy-wire-netted farm gate, peering out. The person with the camera is standing unseen on the other side. The child is laughing, acting up, play-acting goofily, playing to an audience of one, the picture-taker.<sup>5</sup>

The allusion to the taking of the picture itself is meant to make the illusion all the more complete. After the minute description of the photo follow (also in the present tense) the details missing from it – the decor and family – which the eye of the observer brings out.

But the cinema is not only static; it involves movement as well as image. Margaret Laurence does her best to lend her narrative a kinetic, dynamic quality. It is in *The Fire-Duellers*, in whose opening line the author denounces the 'crazy rhyme' of modern life,

that her writing reveals itself at its most dynamic. The book covers three months of the hectic life of Stacey MacAindra: thirty-nine, obsessed by middle-age and overweight, a house going to ruin, four children who are gradually wearing her out, a husband who is a travelling salesman and has no time to talk, a widowed father-in-law claiming constant attention. In the background the big city of Vancouver, the atomic threat, the mass media that day after day assails the heroine. The camera is a multiscreen, fast-shuttering camera, working to the 'crazy rhyme' of Stacey: a good wife, mother and house-keeper but a sexually frustrated woman, she is determined at once to assume her responsibilities at home and to meet the demands of her body elsewhere. Thus the camera takes us from the family breakfast table, across the back country, in a truck driven (at a breakneck speed, of course) by a friend of the husband, or, for a few hours, to some distant beach with a young artist; it brings us quickly back to the MacAindra home more often than not too late for the children waiting to be picked up at school. Then it's dinner, the children's homeworks, the neighbours, TV shows or parties, and on and on goes the frantic round of days. A series of concrete moments, each of which is filtered through the central character's consciousness, flashpast our eyes.

In *The Distances* the movement follows an axis which is no longer horizontal (in *The Five-Dwellers* we remain essentially in the present) but vertical (with a continuous shuttling back and forth between past and present). As a matter of fact the book is the product of a complex cinematic 'montage', a combination of films and small 'dramatiques' (TV plays) in the present tense alongside the first narrative in the past. Into one of the memorybank movies are fitted two inner films in which the image of a fictitious Morag fancying her future literary success and her death is superimposed on the image of young Morag (pp. 124-5). Elsewhere we find small 'dramatiques' which re-enact successive periods of Canadian history and Morag's life, featuring, for instance, the famous female pioneer Catharine Parr Traill circa 1840, Morag's schoolteachers,

her neighbours at the time of her divorce etc.

In order to create movement, to dramatize the narration, the images have to be as sharp and instantaneous as possible. Therefore the narrative in both *The Fire-Dwellers* and *The Disinners* is stripped of the lengthy analyses of the traditional novel; psychological issues are handled in rapid touches or translated into scenes.

Besides image and movement there is also a regular sound-track. Sound effects are first achieved through gross devices: scores of the métis people's songs in the appendix of *The Disinners*, news from the radio and TV throughout *The Fire-Dwellers*, which also abounds in onomatopoeias; the ringing of the alarm-clock is rendered by BRRING in capitals (p. 25), the noise of the traffic is expressed by 'Ching, Ching, Ching' (p. 17).

The sound element is also to be found at a second level – that of the narration. Stacey is assailed by the radio, TV, and the circumambient noises, all the stéréophony of modern life. Morag is lulled by the music of the Canadian national anthem, of the Métis songs, of imaginary conversations. Rachel pays close attention to her own voice as well as to the others'. *The Fire-Dwellers* is a cacophonous book, *The Disinners* a singing one; despite its introspective character *A Jest of God* is not a 'mute' but a talking book.

It is as if through Margaret Laurence's pages we hear the very grain of the human voice. The latter occupies a major place, indeed, in the novelist's world. Most significantly, the TV film that was adapted from the novel *A Jest of God* bears as a title ('Rachel, Rachel') the first name of the heroine who keeps repeating it to herself or aloud, obsessed as she is by the very phenomenon of the voice and, particularly, by the sacred gift of tongues some people are endowed with.

How can the tone of voice be conveyed? By the present tense, because it is closer to life than the past, critic Roland Barthes answers. In Margaret Laurence's works it is also rendered by the dialogues which take up a predominant place in the narration and are made as true to life as possible.

The small 'dramatiques' mentioned above were centred around

dialogues. The dialogues in *The Diviners* retain the traditional form whereas those in *The Fire-Dwellers* are characterized by a lack of quotation marks (and introductory dashes) and of the usual 'he said' or 'she said'; they blend into the text. The reader, who may be disoriented by the absence of any introductory marks, is asked to identify the voice of the speaker by himself. On the other hand, some sentences in those dialogues remain unfinished so as to create the illusion of reality, of the speech voluntarily breaking off, of the voice fading into the surrounding hubbub. Here is part of a dialogue in *The Fire-Dwellers* between husband and wife who have trouble in communicating with each other:

Look, what do you want me to say?  
I don't want you to say anything  
Then why do you keep on  
I'm sorry it's just that (p. 70)

or the conversation carried on amidst the bustle attending the end of a party:

It's been such a pleasure meeting you ladies, and thanks a million, Mrs Fogler, and now I really must  
Thank you for coming. We certainly all had a wonderful (p. 78)

Greater use is made of direct speech than of reported speech which appears in the inner monologues. The heroine addresses herself or tries to reconstitute former dialogues. In *The Fire-Dwellers* Stacey recollects a scene with Tess, her neighbour, who has just had a showy sign made for their house:

- *Three Five Seven* in scrolled numbers and a blue jay perched on a crescent moon. *Get it, Stacey? Bluejay crescent. Cute, eh?* And I said, *Get that's really cute, Tess.* (p. 28)

At another point in the book (p. 52) she attempts to recreate an interview she had heard on the radio:

Margaret Laurence's ideal writing would be an 'écriture orale',

'à haute voix', as Barthes puts it in *Le Plaisir du texte*, one which 'lasse entendre dans leur matérialité, dans leur sensualité, le soufflé, la roquille, la pulpe des lèvres, toute une présence du museau humain . . .' in order to 'déporter le signifié très loin et [ . . . ] jeter, pour ainsi dire, le corps anonyme de l'acteur dans [l']oreille'.<sup>6</sup>

In many respects the audio-visual enterprise of Margaret Laurence reminds one of Dos Passos. By using in their fiction processes related to cinematic techniques both try to convey the complexity of the present, to capture the movement of life and its sounds; both are anxious to express the simultaneity of the events; but whereas Dos Passos proceeds through parallel narrations and the juxtaposition of characters, the facts in Margaret Laurence's novels are refracted by only one consciousness. In both cases the exchange between producer and receiver takes place less at the level of the intellect and sensibility than at the level of perception.

Margaret Laurence's technique is not flawless. In my opinion *The Fire-Dwellers* is a better book than *The Diviners*. Obviously she is taking a new direction, one which suits her temperament, more 'sensorial' than cerebral. She dreams of writing a novel jointly with an illustrator.<sup>7</sup>

How far will she dare to go? What will her next novel be like? The one she is working on right now and which gives her no end of troubles? Will it be a comic-strip novel or one equipped with tape-recordings?

## NOTES

1. Margaret Laurence, 'Ten Years' Sentences' in *Canadian Literature*, XI.1, 1969, p. 16.
2. 'Gadgetsry or Growing? . . . Form and Voice in the Novel', an unpublished lecture reported by Clara Thomas, *The Manitowish World of Margaret Laurence*, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1975, p. 126.
3. 'Gadgetsry or Growing?', p. 125.
4. Margaret Laurence, *A Jest of God*, McClelland and Stewart-Bantam, Toronto, 1977, p. 142.

5. Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners*, Bantam Books, Toronto, 1975, p. 8.
6. R. Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte*, Seuil, Paris, 1973, p. 105.
7. 'Gadgetry or Growing?', p. 126.

MARK O'CONNOR

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## The Black Cabaret

Like every place on Earth it was packed. NEW UNSCRIPTED SHOW – THE WAY WE MIGHT HAVE BEEN ran the 3-D hoardings outside. The Black Cabaret was the latest thing: a place where people came, not to be lifted out of themselves, but to be lowered into a sort of communal sink of negative emotions. An inchoate prayer, one of my men had called it. A gross slander on our parents, said another.

Inside there were no lights. A long-haired usher, wearing a glittering pendant across his bare chest, took Denise and myself by the hand, leading us by some sixth sense down what seemed like a long tunnel of black velvet cloth. Then I sensed that we were entering some more open space, and almost at once we were jostled and bumped by an unfriendly crowd. Still there was nothing visible. We stumbled up a metal ladder to some other place, crowded also, and then over the shins of a long row of people until, abruptly, we were commanded to sit in the two empty seats we found behind us. There had been nowhere to leave our coats, so we were still wearing them. I could sense people all around, above and below.



Directly in front a woman was getting instructions from her girlfriend in a loud tinny whisper on how to light a cigarette – no doubt bought especially for the occasion. Well, it was not strictly illegal. There were several noisy puffs, then a sharp fit of coughing. But she was hardly the only one. The air was thick, almost viscous with smoke. Had things really been like this?

Suddenly there was a ring of light in front. On the stage, picked out by a single dim spotlight stood the Master of Ceremonies, visible only by his white make-up and the silver bow-tie and spangles on his dark suit.

'Welcome, ladies and gentlemen', he intoned without a trace of welcome, 'to our evening of Nostalgia. But be warned! This is no self-indulgent Victoriana or Roaring Twenties evening. Tonight we bring you your Origins: your parents' and grandparents' days. . . ' He gave a snide little twirl of his cane. The action drew a meaningless snigger from the couple in front. ' . . . The grand panorama of the Age of Waste! Without which we wouldn't be here ..', he paused for exactly the right fraction of a second, 'three deep'. There was a sort of uneasy response, a low sound as though people were shifting in their seats and sniggering inwardly. He had yet to earn his first real laugh. But he continued with unction: 'And now, to start your evening's entertainment, to get us all off on the right foot, I'm proud to give you, yes it's the sensational success story of sensual show-biz, the one and lonely . . . Silky Stevenson!'

There was a burst of foot-stamping, loud whistles, female pubescent screams, all expertly counterfeited by the modern audience. Abruptly a second spotlight picked out 'Silky's' lean mop-headed figure slouching blindly across the stage. He was almost into the wings on the other side when the MC intercepted him with an exquisitely-timed sortie and led him by the arm to a chair in the centre of the stage. 'Yes folks', he repeated with a conspiratorial giggle, 'it's our one and only Silky!'

There was a sort of satisfied stir from the audience. This was what they had come to see. For like the Victorian age, in fact like

every earlier period in history, the Age of Waste had been reduced in the eyes of its descendants to a series of more or less amusing clichés.

Left alone, Silky cradled the guitar in his arms like a pet kitten, then strummed a few wildly inaccurate chords. More screams and applause. 'Like to sing for you', he intoned nasally, 'a li'l song called *If I was a carpenter*. . .' There were more screams; and of course he chose that moment to decide his guitar needed re-tuning, re-stringing almost. The audience fell about laughing.

I began to relax. It was all tasteless enough, but hardly anything that need interest the Department. And *laissez faire* had always been my policy. . . Something was nudging me persistently and painfully in the ribs. 'Denise!', I thought, rubbing my right side ruefully. There was no mistaking, even in the dark, the sharpest pair of elbows on the habitable globe. 'What is it, lover?' I whispered.

'They've got the period wrong', she hissed. 'That song is late '50s. But their manner's all over the place. Right now he's acting mid-'60s, or '70s even'.

'For Heaven's sake, Denise, what does it matter? Perhaps the song went through a few revivals, eh?'

I was being unkind. But it had always seemed unfair to me that someone who knew as little as Denise should be so nigglingly precise about the little she did know.

By now the performer had begun, his notes trembling with lyric falsity:

If I were a carpenter  
And you were a lady, . .

He milked those lines of all they were worth, letting his voice slide away at the end in an affectation of helpless modesty, as if he had abandoned emotion in favor of powerful restraint; only to pour it all back into the following two:

Would you marry me anyway?  
Would you have my baby?

That last banality was greeted with cheers from one part of the audience, but with hoots of dangerous derision from the other. Only to my immediate right was there a patch of brooding silence. I had the guilty suspicion that she was crying. God knows there is little enough that your average eight-billionth of the human race can achieve: I might at least have allowed her her small area of expertise. But it was too late; and though I wanted to console her, the words wouldn't come.

I was puzzled by the audience. Their response to the second stanza of Silky's song was mixed, as before. It was not especially loud, but it continued for much longer than I would have expected. As if to distract them, Silky was suddenly surrounded by a number of 3-D figures; and I as a professional was forced to applaud, for someone had cleverly taken a couple of old American '60s films and transposed them into modern holograph effects. On one side of the stage a smuck comedian was propounding stuff about 'With six you get egg-roll'; on the other the 10 year-old hero of some family-comedy series was whining 'But Mom. . .' as he proposed some crazy kids-will-be-kids and gosh-cute-as-darn-all scheme.

And then right above the performer, poised in the air as if by magic came the 3-D equivalent of the Black Cabaret's standard publicity poster: a shot taken from a late-'60s car-ad for the good life, showing the smiling blonde-permed consumer-wife in the console seat of her block-long gas-guzzler, surrounded by kids and groceries. The Age of Waste in a single picture! There was a slight burst of applause as the final line materialized underneath, with even its letters 3-D'd: **CHILDREN HALF PRICE**. A nice touch of Waste-iana!

Silky was continuing to belt out the words against his long-dead holograph competitors, but I could sense that the audience were hardly listening. The man on my left moved restlessly. I heard a long angry intake of breath, and then out it came again as a sound I found hard to classify, something between a sigh and a muted scream of rage. He repeated the unpleasant procedure. All around I could sense the pressure of anger building up, until like the

steam valve on an old-fashioned pressure-cooker it erupted in a burst of hissing. But mingled with it was a sort of hysterical giggling, as if this, after all, was what part of the audience had come for: a purging of unhealthy emotions, a reversed Oedipal flowing of black blood. I had the image of a generation ceremonially gathered to curse its parents; and felt I understood something of why this show had roused such antagonism. Was it because the Black Cabaret was the reverse of all other theatrical spectacles; not a celebration but a condemnation of life? A condemnation perhaps even of the one thing that is sacred in theatre: the human kinship that bonds audiences together.

As the noise died down the holographs disappeared, and Silky began the next verse:

If I were a gypsy  
And you were a lady . . .

The lumpy suet of the American dream mingled crassly with the fake old-English greenwood trappings; yet the music was extraordinarily hypnotic. Silky had a kind of genius, I decided, for this sort of thing. He could use his music and his tremulous voice to break down your judgement, draw you into the warm communal mush-world of the song. A lesser performer would have been content with this achievement. But Silky then *re-activated* your judgement after compromising your emotions. Just when he had the whole audience reverberating with him, ready even to sing along, he would abandon his mask of rapture, look straight out at them (directly, as it seemed, at me), drop his lower jaw extravagantly open and begin vacuously miming the words in a clear gesture of contempt. It was like a slap in the face. And then again he would resume his mask, and draw you back into the dream. It was risky as hell. He was making the audience love and hate at once, soliciting and then spurning their emotions. Even on me the effect was like having one lobe of my brain played off against the other, and I felt the rage rising inside. But then Denise's elbow was digging me again steadily in the ribs. 'Darling can't we leave?

This is giving me a headache. And it's all so *predictable*'.

I knew better. This show was playing on the audience's emotions in a way that made it impossible to predict what resolution, if any, it could have. It surprised me that Denise could pretend otherwise – or was I the odd man out? As an emergency measure I grasped her elbow firmly, and above the roar of a new wave of hissing yelled, 'Wait'. 'What?' she yelled back, but I made no reply.

On stage Silky had been forced to pause, and the MC had taken over. 'C'n I ask you, friends', he was yelling into an old-fashioned cord-attached microphone, 'to refrain from throwing our new plastic ash-trays at the *artistes*'. He said 'plastic' as if it had been 'platinum' or 'diamond'. '... And if you find the temptation creeping up on you' – an exemplary ash-tray came skimming out of the dark, grazing a thin furrow across his white-painted cheek – 'if you're finding it hard to resist, we do ask you to bethink yourselves, very sincerely, no, not of our feelings, no, I say not of our feelings' – he was riding the audience's emotions as adroitly as a storm-petrel skims a wave – 'but of, yes, of . . . yes, of course you guessed it . . . of the *starving Indians*!'

There was a howl of resentment at this famous cliché. A barrage of ash-trays, some of them none too empty, fell all around him. One or two connected, but he seemed unmoved. It was as if he too were deliberately taunting the audience, mocking them, focusing upon himself their own self-hatred, reminding them constantly of the difference between the world they had and the one they might have known.

A stir on my left warned me that my unseen neighbour had found an ash-tray and was flexing his arm. I leant away as far as possible, but the next minute his elbow clouted me fair on the temple. Despite the pain I struck back, driving my own left elbow into his soft stomach. There was a grunt and a minute's pause. Then he moved, and I was just in time to deflect a formidable blow to the face. There followed a full two minutes of cursing and struggling as we each tried to get in one clear punch at the other,

impeded by darkness and the press all round. He got in first. It caught me full on the face, and I fell back across Denise, who only then realised what was going on. I must have passed out for a few minutes, because the next thing I can remember is sitting upright again, dabbing blood from my nose and blurrily watching the show.

The MC seemed to be finishing a routine on the old 20th century fallacy about 'two children not increasing the population'. 'Doesn't it double the family right off?' asked his straight man. 'Not at all', blustered the MC, puffing out his chest, 'after all, the parents are going to die some day'. 'And what if that isn't for fifty years?' pleaded the straight man. 'All the better', said the MC with a complacent twirl of his cane, 'they'll be around to see the grandchildren'. And with that the band struck up a great *Whump!* of triumph, like a two-fisted bang on the piano.

You could smell a sort of sullen disgust rising from the audience. They were thinking of all the missed chances, the vested interests, the prophets – no, rather the simple voices of common sense – that had been stoned or slandered. There were groans of rage or despair from several points. And then it happened.

'*Traison des clercs! More treason des clercs!*' cried a loud voice in the audience, and the whole throng took it up, that ancient legal phrase, seemingly relegated to the history books, that had returned to become the catch-cry of modern prosecutions. The word *more*, repeated over and over, had the sound of the sea. The noise went on for several minutes. This was the sort of thing I had been led to expect, but I still didn't know how it would finish. The strange thing was that I could sense a sort of happiness seeping into the crowd. At last they were united in something. All they lacked now was an immediate object for their hate. I think that if the First Citizen himself had been there I would only have had to seed off the cry of 'Lynch him!' and he would have been lost. I found myself hoping that none of them knew my name; for I suspected I knew now to what sort of resolution the evening was building.

When he could be heard at last, the MC gave proceedings a new twist. 'I smell something wrong in the air, my friends', he said unctuously. 'Can someone open a window, please, and let in some fresh, clean air?' This was a black joke. Here in the heart of the city it was an offence to admit air to buildings except via a scrubber system. Then, as the laughter died, 'Alright! Who farted? Come on, own up and admit it'. He paused a moment. There was silence while the consequences of confession, or denunciation, sank in. 'Well don't hide it! Which of you so kindly opened their bowels for us? You?' The straight man emphatically denied it. 'Alright, let's find that farter and get rid of him'. 'Yes, lynch the farter', sang out a hysterical section of the crowd; and 'Lynch him, lynch him', went up the cry through the premises. Though it was too dark for anyone to observe me, I felt the need to join in. Found my lips actually saying the words. For a crowd is like a cut worm: the one thing that it and its members want is to be joined up in the whole.

But then the MC waved for silence. The noise decreased, and disappeared. He took a step forward. There was no trace of his former humorous or sarcastic bearing. 'My friends', he said solemnly, 'what we have to do now is find that person. Look around you everyone, please, look around'.

There was a stir of fear. Should I denounce the enemy to my left before he denounced me. The second of indecision seemed to last an age. Suddenly there was a loud voice from the darkness: 'What do you mean *we* have to find him? This place is all one black fart. And there's the farter – HIM on stage'.

The whole thing must have been loosely scripted, for the MC played his cue superbly. A second's embarrassed silence, a slight shifty look, an unconfident gesture, and suddenly the crowd had picked up the scent of fear, as a stallion snuffs a mare. 'That's the farter. Get him!', sang out a dozen voices at once.

'No. Please my friends. I apologise. . . ' The MC's shift to terror was abject. 'Get him, get him, the overpopulating sod', yelled one of the women in front of me, joyously finding full voice, 'pull his stupid head off! Denise plucked me firmly by the arm; the roar of

the crowd was so great that she had to shout into my ear: 'I'm going to be sick. Darling help me out of here'. This time I agreed at once, glad of the excuse to leave. Now while the crowd was distracted might be the last chance. But then several things happened at once.

As we began elbowing our way in what Denise believed was the direction of the exit, I glimpsed the proceedings boil over. About a dozen shadowy figures poured onto the stage, men and women together. The quailing MC waited with hands outstretched in a gesture half of prohibition half of supplication, until they were perhaps two metres from him; then turned and bolted. In a flash there were three or four dozen after him.

They were checked by a startling 3-D illusion of a police cordon flung between them and him. It lasted perhaps ten seconds, and the quarry was gone. The lights disappeared as the whole place rocked to a roar of 'Get him!' It was a cross between the Black Hole of Calcutta and the inside of a blacked-out hornets' nest. Without warning Denise and I were picked up in a human surge that was pulling us towards the stage. It stopped, and a minute later drove us the other way, moving further in a few seconds than we had managed with all our efforts before. In the dark I lost track of which way we were facing. There seemed to be a cross-current or eddy that was forcing us apart. I hung on to Denise's wrist, but more and more bodies forced themselves between, until I had to let go or break a finger. Abruptly I was brought up against a wall. It seemed unfair to be pushed so inhumanly hard when there was absolutely nowhere to go. And all the time the cries of 'Get him!' and 'What do we want? More! More! More!' went on. Somewhere near me a man was screaming, babbling over and over that his arm was broken. My previous concussion returned as nausea and a sense of unreality, and I felt myself blacking out.

Suddenly I was blinded. We all were. There was a long minute before anyone could comprehend that what had seemed a blinding flash was simply all the Cabaret's lights being turned on at



once. At the same time came the most ear-shattering sound I have ever heard, a single enormous BONG, as if we were hanging just below the clapper of a bell the size of Mount Everest.

When it died away I found myself standing with hands over ears and my eyes just squintingly open. There was no sound except broken sobbing from three or four directions. I found myself desperately wanting something simple and normal to happen. 'We thank you, ladies and gentlemen', a giant voice intoned in a 20th century accent, 'for assisting in this evening's performance. We trust you will forgive us for not taking you fully into our confidence as to its conclusion, which in fact is a little different every night. Please do not spoil the uncertainty for those to whom you may be so kind as to recommend our entertainment. We ask you to leave peaceably, and remember that the police are waiting outside. You can begin exiting now.

When the press relaxed enough for me to get hand to my overcoat pocket I pulled out my cloth street-cap and jammed it down over my forehead. With luck I might pass unnoticed. The crowd was uncannily quiet. We were together, but broken, drained. Then at last it became possible to move. There was still no sound. Slowly, with only occasional sobs, we drew back into ourselves, and then each of us separately turned towards the exit and began the long shuffle to the world outside.

# Laszlo's Testament

OR

STRUCTURING THE PAST AND SKETCHING THE PRESENT IN CONTEMPORARY SHORT FICTION, MAINLY AUSTRALIAN

'The dominant impulse in the new writing in Australia is now an internationalist one' (wrote Michael Wilding in 1975) '... younger writers are concerned with being writers, with creating verbal artefacts, with relating to other writers, in California and Argentina and Europe and New York and Asia'. He expressed a similar view in his editorial of the *Australian Standard* and developed it in the recent *ALS* devoted to new writing.<sup>1</sup>

The trend which Michael Wilding isolated, one of several in recent Australian literature, is best exemplified by the work of a number of writers of short fiction, including Wilding himself. It has 'internationalist' affinities if only because it is part of an evolution which has occurred in the modes of short fiction being written in many parts of the world, and particularly in Latin and North America, following the example of writers like Jorge Luis Borges. Yet the Australian variant has distinctly regional elements, particularly in the work of Peter Carey and Frank Moorhouse, while at the same time seeming to stand in opposition to a well-defined indigenous tradition of short-story writing. Most of the prose writers included in the *ALS* survey admitted a lack of interest in what Frank Moorhouse called 'the humanist tradition of the Australian story – sympathetic to the working-class and kind to kangaroos'.<sup>2</sup> With one exception,<sup>3</sup> they also ignored the example set by the

novelists of the late fifties and sixties, and sought to relate their work to a wider context of English-speaking literature and sometimes to recent writing in Latin America and Europe. The bypassing of such writers as Patrick White, Randolph Stow and Thomas Keneally (amongst others) is puzzling, because there is a strain of individual innovativeness running through their work which often brought it into conflict with a set of critical assumptions which represented the Australian tradition in fiction as essentially a naturalistic (or realistic) one. *Voss* and *Tourmaline* were just two examples of a more generous and flexible conception of the novel than some critics at the time were ready to accept. Innovative short story writers of the present decade still sometimes provoke similar hostility. Recently, a reviewer of collections by Murray Bail and Michael Wilding employed something called a 'crucible of reality' in which their pieces were tested and found wanting, and an untenable distinction between *realistic* and *anti-realistic* modes of fiction (abused fifteen years ago to garble *Tourmaline*) was re-invoked<sup>4</sup>. Fifteen or twenty years on, the controversy stirred up by innovations in the novel which seemed incompatible with a local tradition of realism, has surfaced again over the short story, exposing the blind assumption that the same general conventions of representation necessarily apply to both forms.

Many of the writers who share the 'internationalist' outlook recognise as a source of influence, or at least interest, a number of American authors who came to prominence in the sixties. These range from the Argentinian, Borges, whose influential work was produced two or three decades before it became widely available in English translations, to younger writers from the United States as diverse as Richard Brautigan and Donald Barthelme. These three, with many others, in various permutations, belong to what American critics have seen as an extensive movement, multifariously labelled the literature of exhaustion, new fictionist, black humorous, fabulist, literarily disruptive, fantasist, absurdist, futurist-fictionist, anti-novelistic, innovative, surfictionist, metafictional . . .<sup>5</sup>. Out of this diverse assortment of writings emerge

two contrasting tendencies which result from a split in the main components of the traditional novel: on the one hand, the assimilation of fiction to history and memoir, such as occurred in the work of the Beat Generation – in the novels of Kerouac and subsequently in the writings of Norman Mailer and E.L. Doctorow, for example; on the other, a revival of interest in the *inventions* of stories – in the element of fiction Dr Johnson called 'the fable'. This does not always issue in stories which have the quality of fables. Sometimes it is present as a concern with the problems of invention and the function of story telling. As we shall see, it takes this form in some of Michael Wilding's fiction.

At a very general level, there has been a loosening up of the fairly rigid division of prose fiction into categories according to length, and an increasing variety in the shorter modes which have appeared in the last decade or so. Along with this has gone a rejection, or at least a questioning, of many of the conventions associated with the novel, in particular, the manner of creating an integrated illusion and probable account of life. On the surface, recent fiction sometimes appears to be self-consciously contrived; it draws attention to its own artifices. Yet this is rarely mere gratuitous cleverness, but a recognition that prose fiction has other functions and possibilities besides the communication or representation of common experience (whatever that may be). It may also take the form of fantastic tales, the truth disguised as lies, philosophical speculations, wishes, dreams and nightmares, mock-learned essays, mythologies and fairy stories, for example. Perhaps realism is an aberration in the history of literature, as John Barth once suggested<sup>6</sup>.

The open, critical approach to technique evident in much recent short fiction has a thematic function. Once a writer begins to tamper with the conventions by which fiction renders a model of 'reality' and is distinguished from it, the whole question of our perception of reality is thrown into doubt. Tony Tanner has shown how this has been a developing theme in American fiction since the war<sup>7</sup> up to the point where novelists became concerned

with finding escapes from versions of reality which they conceived as being imposed by others. The process of creating fiction can thus serve an urgent need which is, in the widest sense of the word, political. The innovative modes which have evolved recently enable writers to capture and explore problems with which they are increasingly pre-occupied.

One of these problems – the question of what happened, what the story tells us happened and the impossibility of actually finding out what happened – is a dominant theme in Michael Wilding's fiction. Many of his stories capture an acute sense of the dilemma of living in the second half of the twentieth century, where it is not always possible to find out what is 'really' happening, where we are inundated with data which are not always verifiable, but which somehow document our existence. We are (depending on where we live) more or less at the mercy of others' versions of 'reality'; paranoia sometimes seems the only logical response. 'Hector and Freddie', published in *The West Midlands Underground* (1975) but conceived and drafted some years earlier<sup>8</sup>, illustrates in its style and theme the development of this awareness. It is a transitional story, rooted in the 'novelistic' mode, but with elements of recursiveness (in the interlarded stories for example) consistent with its theme.

Like Michael Wilding's first published novel, written about the same time, it is concerned with living together in unconventional, *ad hoc* situations. Hector copes by making up stories about it and Freddie accepts the imposition of this version of what is happening; he innocently allows himself to be Hector's major character. The arrangement seems to work because Hector's fictions control it, while Freddie is generally the willing victim. Certain elements in the story reinforce this: Hector is allowed to enter the bathroom at all times and may see Freddie naked, but the reciprocal right is denied Freddie. Hector always presents himself at least partially apparelled. Freddie tells his friend, Marilyn about an occasion when he danced naked, Hector whipping him with his tie.

The process of domination in the situation can operate in re-

verse too. Freddie senses that by accepting the role of character and victim he nourishes Hector's fictions, and thus protects him. Moreover, Hector's version of Freddie is sometimes actually helpful. The arrangement is threatened whenever Freddie tries to break out of the role Hector creates for him – by seeing Hector naked, for example, or by usurping the position of raconteur, as he does in relating the story of the lady who said "Whoopie!"

The story is at least partly about the business of telling stories, and this is rooted in the psychological reality it depicts. We all make up stories to cope with our reality and control it (if we can) and power belongs to those who can get others to suspend their disbelief. 'Hector and Freddie' exemplifies this function of fictionalising both thematically and formally.

The fact that it is a recursive story has a number of implications. It raises the question of the relation of fiction to the life it presents, and suggests the complexity and indeterminateness of that relationship. Poets are supposed to be licensed, self-avowing liars, and their stories are said to distort reality in all sorts of ways, but perhaps this is no more than an historical record does. Recent recursive fiction, like Michael Wilding's, is conceived out of the intuitive conviction that the creation of fictions is a means of survival in someone else's version of reality. It is not an escape into fantasy: fantasy is what it is escaping from. The intuitive wisdom of fiction over-rides the evidential truth of history.

This insight into the political function of fictive invention is explored in Michael Wilding's two recent books which are otherwise very different from each other. *The Short Story Embassy: a novel* (1975) has certain aspects of a fable, or rather of a gothic tale – in its names, setting is a mysterious house, Edgar Allan Poe graveyard, and the like. In fact, the author has pointed out that the opening paragraph is an allusion to *The Turn of the Screw*<sup>9</sup>, and it is the atmosphere of tales like this that the book evokes, in a distorted form. In this respect, it is somewhat like Donald Barthelme's 'Views of my Father Weeping', though Barthelme's gothic alludes to Karen Blixen, rather than Henry James<sup>10</sup>. *Scenic Drive*

(1976) is a cluster of short, connected pieces which express a narrator's anxieties about the 'reality' behind the images which confront him, and the way other writers create them. Appropriately enough, pornographic pictures symbolise his dilemma.

Through both these books there is an insistent emphasis on the ways in which stories expose or conceal reality, and perhaps actually create it. This emerges as a pre-occupation with other writers (real and imagined), with journalists and photographers, with characters who complicate relationships because of their own fictionalising activities, with the story and what actually happened, with stories which might confirm unmentionable truths or enmesh the narrator in another's fiction. The act of telling a story is not simply a matter of selecting, recording, shaping and rendering experience. It is a psychological and political necessity – a way of coping with baffling experience which threatens the identity. In *Scenic Drive* the fictionalising process recurs constantly: the narrator is typing up his 'fantasies about a journalist showing people pornographic pictures'<sup>11</sup>, Dexter, the pornographer, is endlessly striving to reduce the gap between his photographs and the situations they depict, other writers like J.W. Holmes and the magazine lady, and possibly, but dangerously, the literary barmaid are threatening to write the narrator into their fictions<sup>12</sup>, and always

The relationships are ambiguous; ambiguous not only to the viewer, but to the characters themselves.<sup>13</sup>

In a rather different way, the work of Frank Moorhouse also exemplifies this pre-occupation with the way people make up stories to cope with reality, but here it is connected with the contrasting pressures of the two tendencies I mentioned at the beginning: fiction as a form of imaginative history, which 'structures what has happened to us', and fiction as the invention of fables. The discontinuous narrative form which he has developed is exactly right for this, for it is in clusters of linked stories that the emphasis can be adjusted between the two tendencies, while retaining the integrity of the book as a whole.

His second collection, *The Americans, Baby* (1972) charts the intrusion of American presuppositions and attitudes into the consciousness of urban Australians. As the story 'The St Louis Rotary Convention 1923, Recalled' reprinted in his next book and mentioned in his latest, makes clear, this is not something which happened suddenly in the post-war decades, but it is important that most of the stories take place around events of the late sixties, when the impact of the United States on Australia took a strong, new and overt form. At this level, the book presents an aspect of American cultural imperialism, and it is ironically apt, from the subordinate Australian perspective, that it ends with a story about a man writing to Twiggy, one of the last symbols of the mini-Britain, while at the same time he is marking fifty-five essays on 'The Decline of British Imperialism'. His pathetic, regressive dream is set against the pervasive, if ambivalent images of America in the rest of the book.

*The Americans, Baby* is a fiction closely linked to history, and here, as in his other books, the author introduces actual people and events, not all of them publicly known. But the stories also capture the conspiratorial fables a generation of young Australians have invented about Americans, based on *Coca-Cola*, the C.I.A. and economic imperialism in Asia, on the one hand, and upon beat writers, black culture and jazz on the other. They present the uncomfortable confrontation of the fable with an American version of themselves, and undermine the secure sense of this on both sides. When Becker, the American *Coca-Cola* salesman tries to escape the Australian's definition of him by disclosing that he is actually a jazz pianist, Kim, the Australian assimilates this to his idea of decadent white jazz, not part of the black struggle, thus destructively framing Becker within his American fairy tale. The contrasting tendencies, towards history and fable, are developed in opposite ways in two of Frank Moorhouse's subsequent books. *The Electrical Experience* (1974) returns to an earlier period; the generation of the parents of the young people in *The Americans, Baby*. It records the coming of the American dream



of success by industry and progressive thinking to small-town Australia in the interwar years, and its obliteration by post-war economic imperialism. It relates directly to the previous book, and sets T. George McDowell's American dream, inspired by the St. Louis Rotary Convention of 1923, against the equally delusive fantasies of his daughter Terri (one of the young people from *The Americans, Baby*). It is not so much like contemporary American writing as it is like the work of John Dos Passos. Like *U.S.A.*, it approaches history in its use of fragments of documentary material and its explanatory demonstration of the connection between the present and the recent past. Even the old photographs in *The Electrical Experience* serve an evidential purpose. However, where Dos Passos kept the four modes of *U.S.A.* strictly apart, Frank Moorhouse allows history, the documentary record, private memoir and fiction to merge. In the novels of John Dos Passos, the elements relate sequentially, while in the discontinuous narrative as Frank Moorhouse has developed it so far, they inter-relate reciprocally, hence the appositeness of the purely formal endings, on stories which introduce an element of self-consciousness, distance the reader from the fiction, but do not conclude it: 'The Letters to Twiggy', which is an outwardly spirally recursive story; the account of 'Filming the Hatted Australian' which with glossary and notes rounds off *The Electrical Experience*; the endlessly extending and branching 'Chain Letter Story' at the end of *Tales of Mystery and Romance* (1977). The historical (or novelistic) tendency in these books is balanced by an open-ended or recursive structure which causes them to operate like fables. They do not tell us conclusively what happened, but give us rather complicated models to work upon.

The latest book, *Tales of Mystery and Romance* exemplifies this tendency very clearly. The stories are all voiced by a narrator who readily admits his own inadequacies, which he sees as both self-defeating yet basically honest when set against the excesses and brilliant trendiness of others, in particular, his first ex-wife, and his sometime friend, Milton. He thinks he knows what reality is,

and his stories are attempts to capture it and free himself from the fictions of others. He is, in this respect, like the narrator in Michael Wilding's *Seismic Drive*, and as a matter of fact, there are veiled allusions in both books which connect them to each other, and a story in Moorhouse's which alleges the truth behind the account of the Jack Kerouac wake in *The West Midland Underground*, but these private connections are of no great consequence. What is important is the process of creating a version of reality for himself in which the narrator is engaged. The story 'The Loss of a Friend by Cablegram' actually demonstrates this by introducing passages from the narrator's journal which relate to events we have heard about in earlier stories, but which in this story are questioned or contradicted by his ex-wife. What actually happened sometimes seems to be indeterminate, but we recognize the need on the narrator's part to assimilate experience by fictionalising it, so that his fabled version has primacy (at least for him). It is impossible to know precisely how the narrator is transforming his memories and experience, or whether some of the incidents 'really' happened or were speculations about what might have occurred, but this is essentially the point of the book. Hence its visual elements do not document or illustrate the fiction (as in *The Electrical Experience*) but relate to it suggestively and symbolically. The rediscovery of the tale (or the fable) with its emphasis on action, plot and invention, restored another power to prose fiction. In a plausible story having a dominant 'historical' or 'novel' tendency, the probable events are calculated to confirm our rational expectations, not to arouse our surprise. In a tale, the improbable can happen and excite our sense of wonder. This gives back to the writer of fiction an aspect of art always allowed to the painter, the poet and the teller of fairy tales. While it is true that the sense of wonder can be aroused cheaply – the depiction of the marvellous is subject to a law of diminishing returns – this sets a criterion for judging tales of wonder, not for rejecting them altogether. The tales, of Borges for example, sometimes tend too far in the direction of fancy (as William H. Gass pointed out) so that

they demand our admiration at their author's marvellous inventive power, but there is another kind of wondrous story which implicates the reader in a mystery which continues to reverberate for him <sup>14</sup>. The action may be simple, but its power to evoke this mysterious resonance is enduring. Fairy tales are a good example of this. Such stories are models, metaphors, or poetic analogies by which the writer works upon the reader, by engaging the reader to work upon it too <sup>15</sup>. The true-told tale is as much the reader's as the author's.

Fables like this extend our sense of the mysterious and disturb our comfortable notions of the distinction between fiction and reality, but the modern tales of writers like Borges, Barthelme and others do this in something like the opposite way to fairy tales. Instead of introducing us to a world of marvels, they disclose the mystery and the terror on the surface of ordinary life. Amongst Australian writers of this decade, Peter Carey and Murray Bail show close affinities with this kind of fiction.

*The Fat Man in History* (1974) by Peter Carey bears a superficial resemblance to the work of the American 'fabulists' but has a distinctive integrity of its own which suggests it was composed in isolation from any such influence. It is less diverse than the collections of Barthelme; it shows little sign of tentative development or experimentation, but reveals a powerful imagination, confidently concentrated. From the gentle yet incisive observation of 'Happy Story' to the surreal nightmare of 'Peeling' there is a unity of tone such as we sense in the work of Borges (though the voice, of course, is quite different). All the stories are highly finished in both their invention and verbal exemplification. This draws attention to their quality as 'verbal artefacts' and gives them a self-contained distinction, so that we feel they have come into existence fully formed, like fairy tales, untouched by the pressures and temptations in the work of Carey's Australian and international contemporaries.

These tales also meet the test proposed by William H. Gass; they work upon us because they give us something to work upon.

They are put together from elements we relate to effortlessly. Peter Carey often recreates a recognizably Australian suburbia of heat and sharp sunlight, nondescript buildings, vacant lots, drive-ins, superhighways and clapped-out cars. These are all specified in precise detail, not in the interest of creating a plausible illusion of reality, but in a manner which brings out their frighteningly surreal quality. By these means he captures the ordinary terrors of everyday existence and the logic of paranoia in mid-century life. These stories invite comparison with the work of contemporary American writers, yet at the same time disclose insights into a predicament which has its specific origin in Australia. They are closer to Randolph Stow's *Tourmaline* than to the worlds of Barthelme, Borges and the like. This makes Carey's work 'international' in the best sense.

Murray Bail's *Contemporary Portraits and Other Stories* (1975) also reveals varied affinities with recent Australian and American short fiction. Some of the pieces in the book are concerned with systems, obscurities, linguistic conundrums or the technical problems of fiction, and in their baffling cleverness are sometimes reminiscent of Borges. The story 'Heubler' for example, is like Borges' 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote' in that it is a philosophical speculation, or the kind of imagined counter-example that might occur in an essay in conceptual analysis. 'Heubler' is a sequence of twenty-three situations which counter general hypotheses. For example, the anecdote about the one person who may outlive art, killing himself in the process, challenges the proposition *ars longa, vita brevis* and also, paradoxically, confirms it.

Some of Murray Bail's other stories have a quite underivative similarity to the work of Donald Barthelme – fables like 'Life of the Party' and 'The Dog Show' (amongst others) deliberately employ slightly stilted language and awkward juxtapositions of incident to capture the verbal and behaviourist clichés of white-collar suburbia. Like Peter Carey, Murray Bail has a gift for uncovering weirdness in the ordinary, often by projecting his

worlds through bizarre and sometimes hypothetical viewpoints which re-structure the dimensions of the familiar world, like the man up a gum tree in 'Life of the Party' the staff racing along the partitions in 'Partitions' or the cartographical travels of Roy G. Biv in 'Cul-de-sac (uncompleted)'.

The visions of Carey and Bail are not, in fact, other-worldly or marvellous, but *surrealist* in the precise sense of the word. Neither is concerned with exploring the recesses of the unconscious; they delineate the horrors on the surface of ordinary life and uncover the menace in the barely noticed superficialities of existence. This is not too far away from some of the more disturbing sketches of the satirist Barry Humphries<sup>16</sup>. Of course, some American writers are engaged in a similar process, and there is a wide overlap between the surreal urban and suburban worlds projected in the stories of a number of writers in the United States and Australia. But there remains an important distinction, not just in the details of gum trees and heat in the Australian pieces and thirteen channels of television in the American, but also in tone. Both are threatening, yet the quality of menace is different. This difference must ultimately remain inexplicable and mysterious, but the Australian stories seem to point more insistently to the thinness of the familiar world, perched on the very brink of the void.

A less menacing but related sense of being on the edge of something was implicit in Michael Wilding's *Stand* editorial where he specified a precise location as the focus of the 'international' strain in recent Australian writing:

'... there were always internationalists; the renaissance Jack Lindsay looked for was in part to be a rebirth of the spirit of classical Greece, lured to the comparable Mediterranean climate of Sydney. In the 1970s the climatic analogy sought is no longer Mediterranean but Californian.'

He goes on to emphasise the contemporary relevance of the 'technological sophistication, the flat surfaces, the instant consumerism, the history-free ease of a parallel, sunny frontier society'. California instead of Greece might seem at first an odd substitu-

tion, but during the sixties it did emerge as the focus of a cluster of elements significant in contemporary western culture. As the historian William Irwin Thompson put it, California stands *At The Edge of History*<sup>17</sup> and prefigures our future. To substitute it for Greece is to move from a cultural perspective shaped by the past to one shaped by the future; to discover that 'history-free case' Michael Wilding mentioned. We learn from Laszlo's papers in *The Short Story Embassy: a novel* that

'The novel structures what has happened to us; with the short story we sketch our future actions.'<sup>18</sup>

A move away from the 'novelistic' or historical dimension of prose fiction to the short story side of Laszlo's distinction entails a move away from national traditions which by their nature are historically determined. Tales and fables float free in a way that realistic fictions do not, but this does not make them internationalist or 'cosmopolitan' in a derogatory sense, as Randolph Stow showed fifteen years ago in *Tourmaline*. What it indicates is a different conception of the function of the art. It is not aimed at interpreting how we got where we did, but with showing us some of the ways we are deceived about where we are.

#### NOTES

1. *Meaning*, 1, 1975, p.106. *Stand*, 16, 2, 1975, p.5. *ALS*, 8, 2, *Australian Literary Studies* 1977, p.117.
2. *ALS*, 8, 2, 189-90.
3. Murray Bail, *ibid.*, p. 188, where he pays tribute to Patrick White, while rejecting much Australian literature in terms which echo White's twenty years ago in 'The Prodigal Son' (*Australian Letters*, 1, 3, 1958.)
4. F. Zwicky, 'Make or Fake? Some Current Fiction', *Overland*, 63, 1976, 52-6.
5. e.g., see Jerome Klinkowitz, *Literary Disruptions*, Urbana, 1975, Robert Scholes, *The Fabulators*, New York, 1967, Max F. Schultz, *Black Humour Fiction of the Sixties*, Athens (Ohio), 1973, Terence Malley, *Richard Brautigan*, New York, 1972, Peter J. Reed *Karl Vonnegut, Jr.* and Joseph W. Slade, *Thomas Pynchon*, New York, 1974, among many others.

6. Interview with J.D. Bellamy, *The New Fiction*, Urbana, 1975, p.4.
7. *City of Words*, London, 1971, *passim* and especially 372-392.
8. Private communication.
9. *ALS*, 8, 2, 1977, p. 119.
10. Note the Danish names (which locate the story in Copenhagen) and the anachronistic quality of the story mentioned, and more specifically, his 'Several Garlic Tales', *Paris Review*, 36, 1966.
11. *Sonic Drive*, p.13.
12. Cf. The Merry Pranksters idea of people trying to get others into their movies, discussed in Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, New York, 1968, *passim*, and Tony Tanner, *City of Words*, 372-392.
13. *Sonic Drive*, p.12.
14. William H. Gass, 'In Terms of the Toenail: Fiction and the Figures of Life', *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, New York, 1972, 73-5.
15. *Ibid.*
16. There was one in which the flat voice of Sandy Stone simply rehearsed, with occasional catches, the advertisements on the railway stations between Box Hill and Melbourne: *Dickie's Towels - Dr. Marge's Indigo Root Pills - Berger's Pants (prepared) Keep On Keeping On - 9 Miles to Griffiths Bros. Tear . . .*
17. The title of his book, published New York, 1971.
18. p.123.

DAVID WILLIAMSON

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## Failed Footballer

I've decided not to try and give a carefully thought out and lucid account of the development of contemporary Australian Drama as

I'm being followed by Gareth Griffiths who'll do it much better. I thought it might be interesting to give you a potted account of my experiences as an Australian dramatist which might give you some kind of feel for the peculiarities and specifics of our theatre scene. The talk will be full of unsubstantiated generalities, wild overstatement and blatant self advertisement.

My motivation for becoming a writer, as is the case with most Australian writers, was that I failed at sport. I was marked out by my height and family history of proficiency for future football (Australian rules) stardom. Height is a great advantage in Australian rules football so my whole family gloated as I grew taller and taller. They were also mildly impressed that I did well at school. A footballer is one thing but an intelligent footballer is even better. When my testing time came, however, the hopes of my family were shattered. On the rare occasions I managed to grab the ball I stood there confused and wondered what to do with it. A family conference rethought my future and came up with that perennial Australian second best. A doctor. Unfortunately somebody merely had to say the word blood, and I got queasy. I had the obligatory masculine matriculation of maths, physics and chemistry so I ended up studying Mechanical Engineering at University because it had the least amount of compulsory chemistry, a rote learning subject I loathed. I was not really highly motivated. I can remember walking into the engineering buildings for my first look at what went on and feeling slightly nauseous at the sight of a row of big greasy machines. I had a secret desire to write but kept this to myself for fear of being thought odd or insane. I told my father that I thought engineering really wasn't for me, but he thought I should do it so I'd have something to 'fall back on', so I finished my degree and promptly fell back on it.

I taught engineering for seven years and wrote. My connection with student revues at University had given me a liking for writing dialogue so I decided to be a dramatist. Unbeknowns to me, obstacles were in my way. Our large state subsidized theatres



were in the hands of Englishmen who quite unconsciously (and not in bad faith) took their main brief to be one of educating and uplifting the beer-swilling natives. Occasionally a new Australian play of quality emerged like *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, but such was the extent of our feeling of cultural inadequacy that its writer, Ray Lawler, had to be persuaded that it was good enough for performance by one of the dreaded Englishmen, John Sumner. There are still Australians around who, despite its critical and box office success around the world, still think that 'that dreadfully crude play' should never have been shown abroad. The idea that literature and plays, whenever they did occur, should be a kind of public relations exercise to improve the image of Australia abroad, had already emerged. After all our tennis players were on the wane, our swimmers weren't winning gold medals any more – perhaps we could catch the world's attention with our dazzling culture, but more of that later.

As well as infiltrating our theatres, another stealthy English invasion was taking place. Britishers from the midlands were taking over the teaching of English in Australian universities, bringing with them the fiery gospel of Leavis. The world was in intellectual and moral decline. Only true adherence to the faith could save us. The result of this movement was that Australian universities turned out thousands upon thousands of B.A. (Hons) with a heightened sense of their culture's inadequacies and only one career available to them. That of a critic.

All in all it was a pretty forbidding climate for a would-be writer to enter. Luckily, however, being an engineer I knew nothing of all this and kept on happily typing and at about this time in Sydney and Melbourne, small alternative theatres, La Mama in Melbourne, Jane Street and Nimrod in Sydney started operating. These theatres, founded because of actors' and directors' dissatisfaction with the state-subsidised monoliths, were actively looking for new Australian plays. Betty Burstall, who founded La Mama where I first had short plays performed, set it up specifically as a writers' theatre. The plays proved popular with audiences,

critics relented and the large theatres started doing new Australian plays regularly.

Most of the plays and playwrights tended to be ambivalent about their culture, satirising its materialism, male chauvinism and aggression but delighting in its energy and exuberance. The plays weren't naturalistic plays of the 'peel the onion and reveal the motive forces of human behaviour' type but tended to be plays which observed ongoing social processes. My own plays were concerned with the way people behaved and interacted socially – the way in which they used language and gesture to display themselves, to defend themselves, to capture attention, to try and win love, respect or envy.

The inevitable question arose when my play *The Remorseless* won a share of the English George Devine Award. Just how good is our local lad? Has he got what it takes to become a contender for the world heavyweight drama crown? They were soon answered. When the play opened at London's Royal Court Theatre in 1973 the general tone of the English critics was one of outrage. *The Financial Times* said that it had always suspected that life in Australia was mean, brutal and short and its worst fears had been verified. Migration should cease immediately. Michael Billington of *The Guardian* said that watching the play was like being kicked in the face by a boot. Back home I was almost on trial for treason. Not only had I lost Wimbledon, but I'd appeared on centre court drunk, kicked the umpire, knocked out my opponent and sworn at the crowd.

The situation was further confused by the fact that a lot of the late appearing heavy weight journals gave the play excellent notices and by the fact that it subsequently went on to win a more coveted award than the George Devine, *The Evening Standard* most promising playwright.

My experiences underlined what the novelist Tom Keneally had once said about the dangers of being a writer in Australia. You were discovered, given premature canonisation, the artistic hopes of Australia placed on your shoulders, then if you happened to

have a critical reverse you were subjected to savage retribution and you spent the rest of your life wandering from bar to bar wondering why you weren't Dostoevsky. I felt as if I knew what he was talking about.

## David Williamson

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### INTERVIEW

David Williamson was guest professor at Aarhus University in the Spring term of 1978. The interviewers were post-graduate students and members of staff.

*You have spoken of an 'Australian uniqueness'. What do you think this is, and what has it meant for your writing?*

Well, Australia is a relatively new country and was first founded dubiously, if you could use that word, because it was originally a convict dumping ground. Then there was a gold rush in the 1850s in which every greedy person came flocking across to find gold and so we've had an obsession with material gain and money ever since, I think. I'm joking, there are a lot of really good things about Australia but it is a strange country in a lot of ways and I didn't realize it was until I started travelling abroad seeing other countries in action.

*Does it affect your writing?*

Yes.

A lot of us knew that the writing coming from Europe and even from America was interesting and arresting but it didn't capture us. We knew that there was something different about Australia so we felt a sense of frustration at only seeing or at mainly seeing the work of other countries. And we felt a drive to say, 'No. This is not what we are like'. We appreciated that it was good writing, but we were different and we wanted to explore the sort of ways in which we were different. Because although there has been a lot of poetry and to some extent Australian prose writing, drama has been very late in getting started. Australian drama has in the past tended to flare up a little and then die away. This meant that at the time in the late 60s when we started writing there was very little Australian drama going on, we felt a great lack and wanted to fill the void.

*When you write a play, how do you work? Do you have clear cut ideas before you start or do themes, plot, and characters develop as you write?*

I tend to look for arresting dramatic situations. I wait until a sort of bell rings in my head to use a crude analogy, perhaps a snatch of a story I've heard. *The Removalists* started when a removalist told me a story. It seemed very gripping, but he didn't particularly think it was anything out of the ordinary, it was just a day in his life. But when I started to hear the story I thought, 'My God, that's dramatic'. So I'm rather looking for dramatic situations initially, I think. I tend to start from character rather than theme, I find if you start with a theme and say, 'I want to point out that something is wrong with something', then the characters tend to fit into the theme and don't have a life of their own.

*Is there a difference in writing for the stage and for the screen?*

Yes, I think that on stage you can still investigate language and the way people use words to achieve their ends, but I think that film is so much tied up with the visual image that you can't afford the same density of language on the screen. So usually when I've converted a play into a film, which I've done twice with *The Removalists* and *Don's Party*, the general trend is less words. The screen just won't take the number of words that the stage will, because the audience is looking for visual images. They want to see the camera doing something interesting, they just don't want to see heads talking.

*How do you explain the theme of human aggression which dominates a lot of your plays?*

Well, it's quite an aggressive society under the surface of friendly mateship as we call it. Everyone is supposed to be everyone's friend in Australia, and we are all good mates. We don't talk about religion, we don't talk about politics, we don't talk about sex or anything that's likely to cause a discussion, because once a discussion gets going in Australia it's likely to be very heated, indeed. In fact some social clubs have rules on the wall that say, 'When you are within these walls you will not discuss politics, religion or sex'. So there is a lot of potential social aggression. You're not likely to get murdered in Australia, or you are seventeen times less likely to be murdered than you are if you're in America. But there's a lot of social aggression just underneath the surface. People love arguing and shouting at each other.

*Have you ever considered writing in a different genre? Novels? Poetry?*

Well, I never considered poetry, but I certainly started off in my early days wanting to be a novelist, but it wasn't my scene. My prose wasn't great and so when I got involved in student theatre I suddenly found the area I wanted to be in. I used to write sketches for student reviews and I experienced the feeling that an audience

was responding directly to your work. You could be there and see whether they were liking it or hating it. It was a good feeling, a very direct sort of feeling, you know. So I decided I'd rather write drama.

*Is anything new coming up? Have you for instance been inspired by your stay in Denmark?*

Yes, my stay in Denmark has really forced me to think quite a lot, and the thinking is still going on, because they are such vastly different societies in a way. We are such a new country and I think there's a fundamental difference between the new countries like America and Australia and the old European countries. I was telling you today that I went into the Danish farm house which had been in the hands of the family for four generations. There was a family history going right back, and that sense of permanence and solidity just doesn't exist in the Australian environment. There is a certain calmness, common sense attitude to life, I think you could summarize Denmark as 'common sense', not being rude but very rational, very matter of fact. So I've been very interested in the stay here. I've really enjoyed it and loved the country, but you couldn't come to a more different culture in a way. It's quite an extreme opposite.

*With which of your plays have you been most satisfied?*

Well, most writers say the last play, because to them they've learned from the plays that went before. Certainly, I think technically *The Club* is more polished than the early plays because you do learn a bit from every play, but whether it is important in terms of its theme and statement is another matter which is very difficult for a writer to judge. A writer can look back on his early plays and say, 'That was a rather crude technique I was using there', but people will still say that was a more important play, because it was saying more important things. So often the writer is

wrong about which of his works is the best. I just think *The Club* is the best piece of technical writing I've done. But whether it's the most important play I've done I don't know.

*Do you have some specific message in your plays, and does the person Williamson crop up as a commentator in the plays or are you completely detached?*

I'll answer the last bit first. Some of the plays have been too autobiographical and retrospective, I think. What if you *Died Tomorrow* was too close to the bones. Two of the characters in the play were fairly obviously closely drawn from life. Luckily my parents accepted it. Their friends kept going along and recognising them, and ringing them up and saying 'That was a really good portrayal of you', and Kristin felt she was in it too. That was very close and I didn't want to do that again. And I certainly have had characters that I've drawn partly from my own experience.

Now to the first part of the question. What I'm trying to say is that perhaps a lot of middle-class life in Australia is faintly ludicrous. I think I have got a slightly ironic stand in the play and am saying I've done these things, people I know have done these things, but if you look at it for a long view, behaviour as well is rather farcical or funny in some ways because there are societies that do have real problems, like India where most people are starving, and I think that it's a little bit self-indulgent in a bourgeois society to think that you've got problems.

*We would like to discuss the question of naturalism, satire and farce. You have said:*

*My writing career was greatly helped by the unrelenting and faultlessly naturalistic production given to The Coming of Stork at La Mama which reproduced the atmosphere of flat-sharing males with gripping authenticity . . . the occasions when I have been most disappointed with productions of my plays have been when the playing style has degenerated into the farcical.*

*Likewise John Bell in connection with his direction of The Removalists:*

*We decided on stark naturalism, exploiting the play's comedy only where it seemed absolutely appropriate and spontaneous.*

*Could we begin by discussing this point in connection with The Removalists? We have talked about Kenny's dying, resurrection and dying again. How much of that pattern did you have from the original story?*

The original story was very simple. Nothing about a person being killed. It's purely my own dramatic invention. I thought of it as good irony. One has the impression that Kenny is now finally on top of the police. And then he dies. It usually works very well with audiences. They laugh right throughout this which is rather satirical surrealism. It's the first panic scene of the play and the audiences laugh. It is in the genre of black satire rather than straight naturalism. I think that none of my plays is strictly naturalistic. The characters are all larger than life in the tradition going back to Aristophanes who treats larger-than-life characters for satirical effect.

*But that means that the characters are types not fully developed.*

That's the same with Aristophanes and Ben Jonson. You need fully drawn characters only if you want to give a naturalistic picture. I try to get into that area between naturalism and satire so that the audience never quite knows what the characters are.

*But your plays were successfully staged 'in a strictly naturalistic way'.*

The text itself tends towards larger-than-life characters and satire, but when the players also lift their style to high farcical levels, the cumulative effect is overplaying. The comment you refer to is related rather to the acting than the play itself. I don't think that my plays need much more than a naturalistic playing style. If you get the satirical text and the overplaying style then you move into



the farcical.

*You don't feel any discrepancy between writing style and playing style when they are different?*

No, I think within the written structure of the characters there are enough indicators of the fact that they are larger-than-life characters without an exaggerated playing style. This may be detrimental to the play, e.g. the playing time of *Don's Party* lengthened by some twenty minutes during the run because the actors found more and more ways of getting longer and longer laughs.

*Did you intend the effect in *The Removalists* to be strongly physical or subtly ominous?*

John Bell who did the Sydney direction opted for fairly direct and physical effects. Fairly energetic people were in a real panic state on the stage. It creates a rather comic effect if you see two policemen chasing each other across the stage as hens with their heads cut off. But the possibilities in direction are infinite. So an ominous Pinteresque Simmonds is a possible interpretation, yes.

*How serious are you as a social critic?*

I never claimed to be a social realist. You can be a satirist criticising society without being a social realist. The audiences are forced at some stage to review and examine their responses to a play. I think that the impact of *The Removalists* in Australia was such that it created introspection about society. The stereotypes seemed true and close enough to the audiences' feelings of aggression. Thus it caused a self-searching atmosphere in the audience which is always the satirist's aim. Actually when the play was first in rehearsal they wanted me to change it into a social tract with Kenny as the good and victorious working class hero.

*But shouldn't this play bring about a change of attitude in the audience by showing alternative values which you also mention in your play: reasonableness and humanity? These are not dramatized in the play.*

I think – or at least I hope – that the alternative values were inherent in the audience rather than in the play. I didn't want little 'angelic' portions in the play showing what you should do.

*What possible pun is there in the title of Don's Party and the disintegration of the Labour Party and the party held at Don's place? Didn't you just take the election night as a frame for the action which is concerned with something quite different?*

Yes, I think one of the points in the play is the relative indifference to the political event and the election results. Actually none of the party are going to be materially or psychologically affected to any great degree by the election results. Perhaps a few days of depression, similar to the effect of their football team having lost. It's not a crucial concern to their life styles who wins.

*And that is your criticism of the society: It's your own fault that things are so bad, you say.*

There is no direct parallel between their lives and the political system. I don't know whether you can lay the blame on the political system for their particular way of behaving at the party. The intention I had was primarily to have a look at the interesting social patterns of behaviour. It's not a play of revelation of character, of tracing down antecedents of their present behaviour. It's just a description of the situation. My plays are of ongoing social interaction rather than naturalistic revelation of character. I think one cannot give a clear-cut character description on the background of so many current psychological personality analyses. And the political life is in a state of total confusion, too.

*To what extent would you like to be your own director? Do you write the play as a kind of short-hand feeling that this is the way ideally the play should be acted out?*

I wouldn't mind sometime to direct one of my own plays, but I have no great urge right now, because the directors who do my plays in Australia – two of them – are very good and I trust them so that I don't even go to rehearsals. They are more inventive than I could be.

*Do you believe in group inspiration?*

No, I've seen bad productions, but it's a question of finding a good director.

*How much room for interpretation do you write into your plays? You make it fairly obvious what reactions the characters should show and what lies behind them.*

In the two early plays about 1970 I had just been through a period of alternative theatre with a Maoist group and I was a bit defensive during that period. Directors had suggested that I shouldn't put any stage direction into the text, but having seen rather gross productions, I decided to put in how *I* felt that the characters should react and behave. I don't think I would do it the same way today.

*What do you mean by alternative theatre?*

Well, I was a member of an APG Collective and they were ideologically Maoist and believed that every decision should be made by the group and that there should be no roles and no directors and no writers. It was a harrowing experience and has probably soured me against the Maoist view-point for all times. Because there were power-plays going on in that group, and yet the ideology was that there weren't any power-games!

*Was ideological censure also applied to the content of your plays?*

Yes, they re-wrote *Don's Party* for me. That nearly finished it and nearly finished me as a playwright for all time. They took out all the dramatically good stuff and made it clear that I could just provide four lines of dialogue now and again. There really were the most brutal and primitive power plays going on, so I withdrew very soon.

*Some critics still regard your plays as socially engaged and political plays.*

Yes. I think it's true that the plays can give impetuses to self-examination of the society. Any satirist can do this through his writings. I keep going back to Aristophanes for to me his plays are just as contemporary as they were 3,000 years ago. The way he attacks pomposity and the other ills in his society. I think strictly political plays don't get anywhere in Australia whilst indirect attacks achieve their goal much more effectively.

*Another question in connection with satire. It has been said that satirists are basically conservative in outlook. What is your opinion?*

They possibly are. I believe that satire is basically ambivalent. You really don't know what the answers are

My plays are a celebration and criticism of Australian society at the same time. The theatre is basically a place where people should enjoy themselves for a few hours. This has always been the case with Anglo-Saxon Theatre in contradistinction to the Germanic type of theatre where the theatre is a shrine of relevance that people must come out better people than they entered.

*But here you show your basic ambivalence. You want to have your cake and eat it.*

Yes.

# The Year that Was

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## AUSTRALIA

Knocking on the sides of the rain-tank, you find unexpectedly that 1978's been a good year for Australian poetry.

'Unexpectedly' because you've grown so used to the publishers' dictum that Poetry Won't Sell, and to the rumour that the formerly flourishing small presses have glutted their own market, that it comes as a surprise to find so many books of real significance.

Certainly the most substantial of those books is Bruce Dawe's *Sometimes Gladness* (Longman-Cheshire). His is the poetry that captures exactly the ambivalent, questioning voices of Australia in the television era and at the same time – with an energetic fusion of satiric wit, irony, compassion, bitterness and pathos – revives the vernacular style of Lawson. Dawe is one of the three or four best poets Australia has produced; as a reader, he is unsurpassed. And yet because of the continuing failure of publishers to promote Australian writers, he is relatively unknown outside Australia. Hopefully, the appearance of *Sometimes Gladness* will change that.

Impressive as this retrospective collection is, however, it should not be allowed to overshadow here significant books by Les Murray, Bruce Beaver, Peter Porter and Rosemary Dobson.

Murray is the poet who, with Dawe, most clearly inherits the pre-eminence of Judith Wright and A. D. Hope in Australian poetry – though in 1978 he published not poems, but a lively collection of prose pieces, *The Pleasant Mandarin* (UQP). These reviews, essays and, as he calls them, 'raves' show his best and worst aspects but are never dull – his energy, humour, brilliant storytelling and encyclopedic knowledge, as well as his tendency

towards the doctrinaire – and provide an indispensable frame of reference for his poetry.

New developments in books by Geoffrey Lehmann, Peter Porter and Rosemary Dobson show how influential the vernacular style of both Dawe and Murray has become in Australian poetry. These three poets, each with an established reputation, are moving away from the kind of poetry epitomised by A. D. Hope's in the 1950s: an academic and Eurocentric poetry that digs into Classical mythology or art or history to satisfy its colonial longing for a sense of the past. That poetry has elegance and wit, but has too often been private or lifeless.

Peter Porter in *The Cost of Seriousness* (OUP) evokes a new warmth in a group of poems quite free of the name-dropping that has so often made him seem a boy from Brisbane come to the centre of civilization; Rosemary Dobson, in *Over the Frontier* (A&R) shows a growing confidence in the world outside her painting and reading. Her poems are less private and freer in line than before. But it's Geoffrey Lehmann who has made the most complete and startling break with earlier work in his new book *Ross' Poems* (A&R). Clearly influenced here by Murray and Wright, Lehmann evokes not a Classical past, but an Australian rural past of 'pork chops cooked on a shovel' and blue and green beetle wings baked accidentally into bread, in poems that are like short stories, accompanied by photographs.

In *Ross' Poems*, Lehmann shares with Dawe and Murray a robust vernacular that is related, and yet in contrast, to the quiet and subtle freedom of Bruce Beaver's seventh collection, *Death's Directives* (Prism). Beaver's intimate conversational tone, his vulnerability and strength in an honest refusal to strike poses are the features of a distinctive voice whose power gathers surely and unobtrusively. Like Dawe, he deserves to be better known.

The general brightness of the year in poetry is filled out with books too numerous to discuss here, but two particularly: Michael Dransfield's posthumous *Voyage Into Solitude* (UQP) demonstrates again the strength of a voice lost too soon; David Campbell's

revised *Selected Poems* (A&R) includes more recent work to show the one poet of the older generation in Australia, already a powerful presence, to become unfailingly more interesting.

The overall achievement in fiction has not been quite as high, although it's David Malouf's second novel that is the outstanding Australian book for many years, and it's the short story that has revealed the best new writer of the year: James McQueen. McQueen comes to a first book fairly late, but with the benefit of an even and mature talent in *The Electric Beach* (Robin Books). In these 'short fictions' from Tasmania (along with an increasing volume of work coming out of Queensland) you have the nearest thing to the development of a regional writing in Australian literature. McQueen's stories tend towards the gothic: a coffin is lowered into the ground and keeps falling; a girl looks across the river at the ugly slag heaps of the zinc works and sees only the pyramids of Egypt; a man worries about how he is going to bury his dead father when it's been raining for weeks and the ground is heavy and sodden beyond digging. But they evoke a strong sense of place, rather than a literary debt to Poe or Faulkner. Tasmania is a place of slow brown rivers and weed-choked backyards, as well as the tourist's paradise; the country of Gabbett, the cannibal convict in *For the Term of His Natural Life*. The development of McQueen's writing will be interesting to watch.

Patrick White remarked in a recent interview that Australian writers tend to trot out a Catholic childhood, the Depression, or an autobiography because 'they haven't enough disguises in their wardrobe' (*The National Times* 30/6/79).

He's right and wrong of course, for just as several of the poets can be seen moving (albeit late in the piece) towards a less colonial position, the year's fiction and drama reflect a growing impatience with old definitions of 'Australian Literature'. Nicholas Hasluck's impressive first novel *Quarantine* (Macmillan) is a sophisticated intrigue set in the Middle East; C. J. Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously* (Nelson) is set in Indonesia during Confrontation; Louis Nowra's play *Inner Voices* (Currency), the year's

best new play, is set perhaps in 18th century Russia; Morris Lurie's novel *Flying Home* (Outback) is about one of the jet-lag generation with a terminal case of Jewish guilt, who travels around the world with the ghosts of his dead parents always in the seats behind him.

The Australian novel and play increasingly refuse to be *about* life in Australia in subject matter. The publication of the first play by an Aborigine, *The Cake Man* (Currency) by Robert Merritt, and the first novel, Monica Clare's *Kambran* (Alternative Publishing Co-Op) demonstrate that these genres are no longer exclusively white.

But the ambivalence of categories is nowhere more clearly seen than in the relationship between the year's two best novels. Winning the premier award for Australian fiction, the Miles Franklin Award, is Jessica Anderson's *Terra Lieta By the River* (Macmillan) – a lousy line given by Tennyson to Sir Lancelot, and even more ludicrous used as a title here, incidentally. The novel is intelligent, beautifully written, and evokes with simplicity and economy the artist as outsider (again?) in a society which urges caution and conformity. David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life* (Chatto & Windus) takes as its narrator the Roman poet Ovid in exile at the edge of the Russian steppes, and tells of his relationship with the frontier tribe there and a feral child who materialises out of the wilderness. It's a splendid book.

There's no doubt that Jessica Anderson's novel is a good one; and there is no doubt that David Malouf's is better. But because *Terra Lieta* depicts life in Australia and thereby conforms to the rules of the Miles Franklin Award, it is regarded as book of the year, and not *An Imaginary Life*.

Another problem of definitions arises with books by two of Australia's best writers for young people: Patricia Wrightson and Lilith Norman. Although each produced in 1978 her finest book to date, both were completely ignored by the award-givers, because they were not exclusively 'children's books'. Lilith Norman writes in *A Dream of Seas* (Collins) one of the best short novels I've read,



about a boy who with his widowed mother comes to live at a drab flat overlooking Bondi Beach. When he looks out his window one day, he is shocked to see seals bobbing on the swell; but when he races down the beach for a closer look, they are only board-riders in black wet-suits, waiting for a wave. The fantasy life from his window results in his becoming a seal, merging with the water in which his father drowned. It's an unsentimental story that is both particularly Australian and universal in its dimensions.

More powerful still is Patricia Wrightson's *The Dark Bright Water* (Hutchinson): completely self-contained, but the second book in a trilogy that deals with a young urban Aborigine who discovers his lost cultural heritage and joins forces with the Old Things of the spirit world unknown to the land's white inhabitants. This novel explores with a power that is rare in literature for adult or child, notions of heroism, friendship, sexuality, and it proves Wrightson to be the last and strongest of the Jindyworobaks, who tried in the 1930s and '40s to fuse white and black Australian cultures in their writing.

And its questioning of the old categories that some would like to maintain, added to Malouf's, Nowra's, Dawe's, Murray's, will not go away.

MARK MACLEOD

## NEW ZEALAND

Most important books from New Zealand in the last twelve months are undoubtedly two, the final volume of Frank Sargeson's autobiographical trilogy, *Nearer Enough* (dated 1977 but not published until 1978; earlier *Once is Enough*, 1973; *More than Enough*, 1975) and the outstanding new novel by Maurice Gee, *Plumb*. And our leading literary quarterly *Islands*, No. 21 (vol. VI,

no. 3, 'Spring '77' – but so behind-hand that again a '78 publication) devoted the whole of a 150-page issue to 'Frank Sargeson at 75', a fascinating *bricolage* of comment, memoir, criticism, what-have-you that make this particular issue already 'a collector's piece'. Sargeson, our senior fiction writer, pioneer, almost 'onlie begetter' of New Zealand fiction has always viewed N.Z. society through (increasingly impish) disenchanted glasses; Janet Frame, very differently indeed, again 'stands off' from city, paddock, and suburbia. Maurice Gee, on the other hand, in such stories as in *A Glorious Morning Comrade* (1975), or his recurrent suburban chronicles either of puritan murder – *In My Father's Den* (1972) or of disintegrating marriage – *Games of Choice* (1976 – much praised 'overseas') or now *Plumb* – densely-penned story of an indomitable nonconformist looking back in his life and its rich familial and ideological vicissitudes through a long and embattled life – in all these Gee writes, sharp-eyed and ironical if necessary, from *within* the norms of routine N.Z. society. This writing does not lose by this social absorption – yet bookish and aging males are dominant in parts of all these books in a way that brings us back, full circle, to Sargeson's long shadow.

There are two other recent candidates for prose 'honours', Vincent O'Sullivan's stories, polished and varied, *The Boy, The Bridge, The River*, and first novel from one of our trio of Maori writers (poet Hone Tuwhare, fictioneer Witi Ihimaera, and herself), Patricia Grace (*Waiairi*, stories, 1976), *Mutukihema: the moon sleeps*, brief but impeccable account, rich in implication, of a young Maori girl growing into 'two worlds'. Incidentally, both Grace's titles, along with all so far by Samoa's Albert Wendt, are in our Longman Paul's excellent series both cased and paperback, 'Pacific Paperbacks'.

Perhaps in poetry there have been only three recent titles of consequence: Elizabeth Smither's *You're Very Seductive William Carlos Williams*, Hone Tuwhare's *Making a Fist of It*, and C. K. Stead's *Walking Westward*. Elizabeth Smither, poetically a new arrival, is wife to one of our best painters, Michael, and has

recently been publishing quite extensively not only in New Zealand but in *Poetry Australia* (which saw the first appearance, incidentally, of Stead's title poem) and also in *The London Magazine*. Hers is unpretentiously low-key, often witty, intellectual verse; Stead's, of course, is more experimental and pyrotechnic; I've not yet sighted Hone's volume but it sounds as if it may ring promisingly true to his role as not only Maori – but Marxist and union man.

For academics, Oxford's local 'New Zealand Writers and their Work' series, adds to these paperback titles on Mulgan, Mason, Glover, and Eileen Duggan to those already published on Bethell, Baxter, Sargeson and Brasch. Coming up, threateningly, is *James K. Baxter as Critic*, a selection from his literary criticism by friend and Marxist university teacher Frank McKay (Heinemann G.B.) and also Baxter's voluminous *Collected Poems*, to be edited by a similar figure, Jim Weir (Oxford). Former Professor Ian Gordon promises *The Urwera Notebook* (Oxford) about K.M.'s final, 1907, N.Z. 'backblocks' trip. In University of Auckland/Oxford's prose reprints (cased and paperback) has come *All Part of the Game*, short stories by A. P. Gaskell, ed. R. A. Copland, which comprises his *The Big Game* (1947) and further stories; just out is J. R. Cole's *It Was So Late* (1949).

In periodicals quarterlies *Landfall*, *Islands* move steadily on. *Pacific Quarterly* (formerly *Cave*, then – excessively – *New Quarterly Cave*) has given over its latest issue to Malaysian and Singaporean writing cased in gold – but this is outclassed by the usually thin and scraggy (though quarto) *Pilgrims of the Arts* (sub. NZ\$7.20 overseas; Box 5469, Dunedin) of which the latest issue (Nos 5 & 6) blossomed into a 207-page production in silver and black, like a young (N.Z.) telephone directory, calling itself *The Double: Israeli and New Zealand Arts and Letters*. Besides bringing us up to date on the Tel Aviv English poets – elegant and sophisticated prose, poetry, graphics, with translation from Hebrew – the local half has a quite impressive line-up including a generous amount of interesting critical writing and interviews including one with the

quite photogenic and rising poetical star Elizabeth Smither (see above).

Forthcoming in Price Milburn's small paperback short stories series (so far Helen Shaw's *The Gipsies*, interestingly fastidious) is not only a selection from Dan Davin but also what – from her recent appearances in *Islands* and *Landfall* – would be a very interesting volume indeed, from newcomer Yvonne du Fresne, dealing with Danish settlers in our North Island's Manawatu region – and the psychic pull between old and new worlds alike in young and old.

PETER ALCOCK

## THE SOUTH SEAS

Four or five items here. First Longman Paul (Auckland) advise an anthology of the new South Seas (not N.Z. Maori, Papua New Guinea, or Aboriginal) verse will be launched in 1979. To be called *Lali: A Pacific Anthology* (*lali* is the Fijian wooden slit-drum) and edited by Albert Wendt, it should prove an invaluable point of entry into this new world rising.

Second, University of Queensland Press, in their series 'Asian and Pacific Writing', advise that mid-1979 should appear a collection of (now) about thirty (30!) Maori writers – part in Maori, part in English – under the title *Into the World of Light: Contemporary Maori Writing from New Zealand*. It is edited by Witi Ihimaera and *pakeha* N.Z. poet Don Long.

Thirdly – there is currently what can be only termed a *spate* of new literature in English from the *Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies* (Box 1432, Boroko, P.N.G.). These include several new novels (thereby increasing the English novel output of P.N.G.

several hundred per cent): Russell Soaba, *Wanpis* and from John Kolia, *The Late Mr Papua* (I strongly recommend this!), also (not yet read) *Up the River to Victory Junction*, *Victims of Independence*, *My Reluctant Missionary*, *A Compulsive Exhibition*, also *Without Mannerisms and Other Stories*. 'The amazing Dr Kolia' (as he is called by the Port Moresby *Post-Courier*), at time of writing, in place of Ulli Beier, Acting-Director of the Institute, has also published a number of plays, for radio and otherwise, some of which are collected in two Institute paperbacks, *Historical Plays*, and *Awkward Moments*. All John Kolia's writing I have seen so far is on local themes of cultural clash and is sardonic, witty, off-beat, concerned with situation and ideology. Among the many other publications of the Institute (other than more purely anthropological, sociological, 'discussion papers', recordings etc. – a full list is available) are two promising poetry volumes, *Naked Thoughts*, by Russell Soaba, and by Ulli Beier, *The Eye of God Does Not Grow Any Grass*, 'a series of broadcasts in which P.N.G. poetry is juxtaposed with other poetry round the world'. Among a number of plays one of the most praised is from Nora Brash, *Which Way Big Man*, a sharp look at the temptations for a new élite.

From South Pacific Creative Arts Society and Mana Publications (Box 5083, Raiwaqa, Fiji) has now come the final and *Third Mana Annual of Creative Writing*, and *Mana* itself (formerly *Mana Review*) is now into its second six-monthly issue. It has been joined by the well-produced lively and promising *Fankaa* from Tonga (2-3 a year, single issues airmail – Europe – T\$3.70, 2nd class T\$2.10, from South Pacific Centre, Box 278, Nuku'alofa, Tonga).

Finally, from the newly independent Solomon Islands are available at least two small poetry volumes, *Twenty-Four Poems of the Solomon Islands*, ed. Dennis Lule and others (1977) and *Who Am I?*, by Leonard P. Maenu'u (1978) – both from University of the South Pacific Centre, Box 460, Honiara, Solomon Islands.

PETER ALCOCK

## INDIA

Last year saw the publication of over a hundred books, creative as well as critical, which will be of interest to ACLALS members. The best bibliography of such books continues to appear in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, though this still needs to be supplemented by other bibliographies such as the *MLA International Bibliography* (the issues for 1976 and 1977 appeared in 1978). The Accessions List for India issued by the US Library of Congress Office in New Delhi appears each month and is fairly up to date. Other useful bibliographies which attempt to cover all areas of English publication in India (not only literature) are: *Bibliography of English Publication in India, 1977*, (DKF Trust, N Delhi); N. N. Gidwani and K. Navalani, *Current Indian Periodicals: An Annotated Guide* (Saraswati Publishers, Jaipur); and V. K. Jain et al., *Guide to Indian Periodical Literature, 1977* (Indian Documentation Service, Gurgaon). Comprehensiveness is of course what one looks for in such bibliographies and they do a reasonable job, but some books always seem to succeed in slipping the net.

Several Indian academic journals continue to be behind schedule due to the difficulty of attracting contributions of quality. The new *Commonwealth Quarterly* (which brought out a special December issue on Indian women writers), the older *Indian Book Chronicle*, as well as the more established *The Literary Criticism* and *The Literary Half-Yearly*, are important exceptions.

In line with its previous record, Indo-Anglian drama attracted only two contributors of note: Dilip Hiro (*Two One-Act Plays*, Writers Workshop, Calcutta) and Manohar Malgonkar (*Line of Mars*). Hiro had earlier published *To Anchor Cloud*, but Malgonkar is a newcomer to the genre.

In other respects, 1978 was a year of growth: Indo-Anglian literature followed up its recent successes by Anita Desai's collection of short stories, *Ganges at Twilight*, (Heinemann, UK, 1977) which won both the Winifred Holtby Prize and an award from the Sahitya Akademi (India's Academy of Letters).

Short stories seem to be increasing in popularity: Keki N. Daruwalla, better known as a poet, enters the lists with *Sword and Abyss* (Vikas, N Delhi). Orient Publishers brought out Sasthi Brata's *Encounter*, Saros Cowasjee's *Nude Therapy*, and Nergis Dalal's *The Nude*. Ruskin Bond (*A Girl From Copenhagen*, India Paperbacks, N Delhi), and Kewlian Sio (*Dragons: Stories and Poems*, Writers Workshop, Calcutta) continue to produce sensitive and fine work which is underrated. Manohar Malgonkar's *Rumble Tumble*, as the name suggests, includes short stories and social satire of varying quality. And there was a reissue of Raja Rao's earlier, out of print volume of short stories, with three additional stories, as *The Policeman and the Rose* (OUP, India).

Bhabhani Bhattacharya has, after more than a decade, published *A Dream in Hawaii* (Macmillan, N Delhi), and Malgonkar has produced an unusual fictionalisation of a film in *Shalimar*, as well as a historically well-researched, *The Men Who Killed Ghandi*. R. K. Narayan has published a travelogue, appending a play and a short story, *The Emerald Route* (Directorate of Information and Publicity, Government of Karnataka, Bangalore). What attracts attention, however, is the work of the newcomers (all from Vikas, N. Delhi): Hilda Raj's *Trail of Exile*; Himmat Singh Gill's *Asker and Petals*, a novel of post-partition India; and Shouri Daniels' *Salt Delf* – the first portrayal in Indo-Anglian as well as Anglo-Indian literature of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala, which claims spiritual descent from St Thomas (the Doubter) in the first century.

Temporarily, at least, Timeri Murari seems to have deserted Indian themes for international ones, and literature for money. He has followed Shyam Dave into writing a thriller: *The Oblivion Tapes* was published by the Berkeley Publishing Corporation, New York; and Dave has produced *The Gum Docket*, *The Isaac Docket*, and *The Stark Docket* (all Orient).

P. Lal has published his most ambitious poem, *Calcutta*, the sections connected by the locale, and presided over by Mother Teresa. Nissim Ezekiel continues his exploration of religious

themes in 'Latter Day Psalms' (*Debanir Magazine*, volume VII, part 9, pp. 58-60), though whether this brings him any closer than he has earlier been to his Jewish heritage is a moot question. Suresh Kohli has published *Since Decay Impairs: Love Poems 1966-1977* (Indian Literary Review Editions, N. Delhi). Other volumes worth noting are Meena Alexander, *Without Place*; S. B. Lal, *Green Thoughts*; Vilas Sarang, *A Kind of Silence*; and M. A. Das Gupta, *Hers; Indian Perspectives: An Anthology of Poetry in English by Indian Women* (all Writers Workshop); and M. Chatterjee, *The Sound of Wings* (Arnold Heinemann).

A new publishing concern of promise, New Ground, Bombay, has published *Three Poets*, (Melanie Silgado, Raul D'Gama Rose and Santan Rodrigues).

Critical volumes of note include K. R. S. Iyengar, *Microcosmographia Poetica* (Writers Workshop); G. D. Narasimhaiah, *Awakened Conscience: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*; R. Mohan (ed.), *Indian Writing in English* (Orient Longman, N. Delhi); R. G. P. Sinha, *Indian Autobiographies in English* (S. Chand, N. Delhi); G. P. Sharma, *Nationalism in Indo-Anglian Fiction* (Sterling, N. Delhi); G. A. Reddy, *Indian Writing in English and Its Audience* (Prakash Book Depot, Barcilly); B. Ramachandra Rao, *The Novels of Anita Desai* (Kalyani Publishers, N. Delhi); and Jasbir Jain, *Nayantara Sahgal* (Arnold Heinemann).

PRABHU S. GUPTARA



# Correspondence

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## WHO'S IGNATIUS, WHOSE LOYOLA?

In his review of my book *Edenic Radio* ('Boeotian and Loyolan Art', *Kanapipi* 1/1) Mark O'Connor has some flattering things to say, and does my verse considerable honour. I am grateful to him; poets reviewing other poets aren't always so generous. At the same time, there are a number of inaccuracies and strange interpretations in the article, so many in fact that I feel obliged to break a convention and make some reply, lest people new to my work be misled.

For some days after first reading the review, I agonised over some of the aberrant readings, asking myself whether I'd really written so loosely and equivocally as to justify them. In the end, I couldn't agree that I had. And then there is the ideological dimension of the article, the prevailing inquisitorial tone; often, it seems as if my work and my attitudes were being judged before the bar of a vaguely adumbrated but allegedly triumphant modern world view which admits of no deviation, no argument, and rewards the independent minded with the Siberia of artistic failure. I don't know which of us the Jesuits had till the age of seven, but I don't think it was me. As a child, I was a Free Kirk Presbyterian, but I turned away from that and had no religious affiliation until I was received into the Catholic Church at the age of twenty-four. I missed, or was spared, a proper Catholic education in my adolescence.

To save space and long explanations, during this gentle rebuttal of some things in Mark's review, I will assume that readers have the piece beside them for reference. That way, points can be dealt with in order of their occurrence.

I am not really a social conservative. In looser connections, and for convenience, I've been prepared in the past to allow this shorthand description, but when it's used as a stick to beat me with, I have to refuse it. What I really am is a historicist or cultural relativist, in the sense that I bear it in mind that there have been and will be other times, and other opinions than those prevailing at the moment. I do very little of my thinking in terms such as Conservative, Progressive, Radical and the like, because they tend to be loose terms open to rhetorical and coercive misuse. They are more the stuff of the journalistic sketch or the secret police dossier than the proper currency of poets and reviewers. As servants of ideology, they divide up the world and human experience in ways which are highly questionable. I don't accept that system of dividing up

the phenomena. I've gone on at some length about this misrepresentation, as it colours and distorts the whole article.

I don't advocate an Australian republic 'less for what it might change than for what it might conserve'. I advocate it as a means by which we might shake off remnant colonial blindnesses, and discern what is *there* in our experience as a people. Only when we learn to love ourselves will we know what to conserve both for our own cultural sustenance and as a source for distinctive contributions to human civilization.

Mark comes from an ancient Gaelic family himself, and so should understand about Gaelic pride of family.

I live in the city most of the time, ten months out of twelve, because my father and I own a small farm jointly, and it's hard to fit two strong-headed bosses on one forty-acre farmlet. It's his territory, his retirement farm, and he hasn't much else to occupy him now that he's left the timber business. We will move there eventually, when he is older and needs care, or when fellowships cease and we have to go there to survive financially; the latter could happen anytime.

Unfortunately, I don't really speak most of the languages of Europe, not at all fluently anyhow. I speak some, and read most of the Western European ones. I used to be a science translator, which helped.

I don't think I ever conducted an adolescent rebellion against universities. I attended a university in my late adolescence, and resisted some of its requirements in the interests of getting an education in my own dreamy, groping fashion. Quite a few years later, I had a number of hard things to say about universities for several reasons; most importantly, I deplored their serving as the powerhouses of a certain social style which for a time threatened to become dominant. This was a style which made intellect, fashion, and certain received opinions into the 'new money' of an incipient privileged class, and incidentally converted socialism from being a movement and an ideal to being a *class*. And a privileged class at that. I thought this a betrayal, and a tragedy, to see socialists joining with the other colonial elites to resist the triumph of the proletariat, a triumph which is felt to be close to the surface in our country and a looming threat to imported civilization.

Evolving a truly populist style of verse has never really been an aim of mine, so perhaps I may be excused the charge of failing at it. I do regret the exile of poetry from a broad readership, but I don't despair about it, and I decline to consider any effort to secure a mass readership which would involve a lessening of poets' freedom to use the full range of their instrument. Or any condescending simplification. So would Mark himself, of course. I don't think the matter is by any means simply one of metre, if that is what he's suggesting.

I don't write free verse, and rarely have. I write blank verse a good deal,

unrhymed but with a strong metrical base on which to build variations.

Nothing about Alec Hope galls me, and I don't remember ever decrying him as an 'Athenian' poet, in my terms. He isn't. I don't agree that he has found a solution to the twentieth-century problem of metre; Augustan metre and rhyme with modern content doesn't equal a solution to that problem – if it is that sort of problem at all, at bottom.

Since I can't assume that readers who haven't seen me will know that I am a fat man, I didn't intend 'flat food round the midriff, long food up your sleeves' (in 'Vindaloo in Merthyr Tydfil') to refer to my surplus fat, but rather to the techniques of shoplifting from supermarkets. A long time ago, in our non-welfare state, I got down about as far as you can go, economically, and I have no shame about the devices by which I survived certain hungry weeks. I don't assume a heavily intellectual reader, but I guess I expect reasonable shrewdness. Which is a dry form of human sympathy, in part.

I deny that I go in for implausibly cyclic views of social history. I see history more as a vast field of experience in which myriad suggestive metaphors are mixed.

Mark is, I think, a bit naïve about the power of fashion. It is a restless and seductive force, and one which is apt to turn upon people who try to harness it. Even as he damns me for non-adherence to a certain set of received ideas, they are shifting under his feet.

Even as he decries me as a conservative thinker, Mark is constrained by the terms of his argument to turn me around 180 degrees and make me into an extreme radical. He is not the first commentator to have landed in this paradox, but I regret his landing there. It comes about because his terminology is not up to the quality of his thought. Or of his mind.

The poem 'Impulse Related on the Manly Ferry' (somebody had to take advantage of the place-name Manly!) probably offends because it talks about sex in a dispassionate, phenomenological way, refusing it worship. That's my gross prejudice, something of a Christian one admittedly. Christianity is an all-the-wheel religion, opposed to all idolatries, though even sex inquisitors have tragically forgotten this at times.

The 'humanist mainstream of Australian debate'? Wait a minute! I thought it was still a pluralist mainstream.

Yes, I'm a Christian, in my thinking and, however unsteadily, in my life. I don't slink around trying to sneak it in, though. It is the subsumed basis of my thinking, as it is of Western civilization.

I deny ever having asserted that an unwanted pregnancy should be accepted as a divine summons to experience. It may be, but it sounds like a very presumptuous thing for a man to say categorically. I also have nothing against contraception (the world will be relieved to hear!) though I do think that it is unreal to ignore, and dangerous to deny, what Judith Wright calls 'the third

who lay in our embrace', the child.

My opposition to abortion is no secret. I can't agree that it is impossible to argue in human terms that destroying a *locus* (jargon term for an unborn child) is the same as killing an adult. Many people have argued that way, very convincingly. What Mark is really asserting, I think, is that it's not possible to argue such a case in humanist terms. And yet some humanists have done so. My own contention, of course, would be that the term *human* is incomplete without the religious dimension, since religion is part of us, and its exclusion is a highly artificial, ideological thing. Rationalism, so called, is itself, a sort of art-form in which the challenge is to construct an account of the world without admitting any religious explanations. The effort has gone on for about three centuries now, and the result is enormous, imposing and subtly ramified, a tall, hierarchical, snobbish tower of glass and elegant steel and fine cement, in which many people go mad and seek after strange gods, reaching back into the prehistory of religion in order to satisfy needs and resolve dilemmas which have already been satisfied and resolved in developed religion.

Mark is probably justified in taking umbrage at my poem 'The Cwdeitar', as I wrote it partly as an affectionate tilt at his passionate advocacy of spelling reform in English. He's wrong on a few points, though. The poem is perfectly pronounceable, it quotes a number of phrases in a new, admittedly ugly but perfectly phonetic English orthography, and gives broad clues whereby the system can be quickly mastered. Any phonetic spelling system for English would look excessively queer when it first came in – and would of course carry the shock and dislocation of cultural amnesia. We would lose the perspicuous etymology of our words, their history and individual flavour, surely a disaster for poets. I think any thoroughgoing reform would have to be imposed; people are quite resistant even to so mild a change as SRI. The question then arises, who would impose it, and for what purposes? I posit the thing as being done by a mad Australian chauvinist dictator who is out to relieve foreign cultural pressure on his country by making books and magazines from abroad literally inaccessible and unreadable. The new spelling could only be introduced in one country at a time, of the English-speaking countries, English is polycentric, and has too many standard forms by now for one to be imposed over its whole range. Phonetic spelling would mean the end of English as a world language, as it would quickly break up into a number of diverging dialects, the present rich agreement-to-differ would have been broken. He's wrong, too, about the two million adult illiterates in Britain. In a population of fifty million, that's four per cent, which is pretty well the standard proportion everywhere, in countries with phonetic spelling systems and with idiosyncratic ones. It represents the unfortunates whom teachers call ineducable, the subnormal, the severely dyslexic, certain of the severely handicapped, etc. The village schoolmistress resis

her case, pleading that the poem was a joke, albeit a serious joke, and as much about cultural chauvinism as about spelling.

I have talked about my differences with the universities, so I won't labour my disagreement with Mark's interpretation of my poem 'A Sixties Future'. It is enough to say that he has got it so strangely arse-up that he bewilders me! I was positing a future-scenario in which universities became so dominant in society that their jargon and hierarchical organisation was extended to the whole of society, and factories became Faculties of Production and the like. It was never a likely future, as such, but the poem refers to a certain atmosphere which was around in the sixties, and satirically exaggerates it. Mark understood my main point, in the serious poem 'The Future', which was that since the real future cannot be foreseen – 'all our projections fail to curve where it curves' – any future-scenarios which we set up are to be understood, and maybe even enjoyed, as fictions. Fictions which come and go.

There hasn't been any rain forest on our farmlands for nearly a hundred years; we certainly didn't buy it and cut it down. Mark, having knocked about the country, should surely know that in farming areas the term 'brush land' refers to a soil type. Heavens, the poem even speaks of the chainsaw dropping *dead* timber. As well as to re-roofing a bare pole barn; no barn is likely to have stood, and stood long enough to have lost its roof, in virgin rain forest. Even the list of previous owners should have been suggestive. He has been carried away here by his laudable passion to promote a much-needed spirit of conservation among Australians. A passion which I share; that made his mistake here a rather hurtful one. I thought he knew me better.

The assertion that machine translation hasn't yet been a success is justified by my researches into the matter. Computers still can't handle real translation, as distinct from matching up words and simple phrases, and I believe that the effort to produce a translation machine has run into the sand. We still don't know the deep structure of language, but whatever it is, it doesn't seem to fit the either-or mathematics on which computers are based. Idiom, emotional colouring, most of the effects of poetry, these seem still to lie in a realm beyond the machine. Perhaps they won't always, but while they do, the fact is a covert and little-discussed threat to the tall glass tower I spoke about above.

Finally, I'm rather horrified to see a reviewer warning readers not to buy my book, especially after he has praised parts of it generously. Perhaps that is a personal thing, though. He at least does recommend that people get my *Selected Poems*, which he erroneously calls my *Selected Works*.

Mark O'Connor is a good poet and will be a better one yet; he is a man of deeply held convictions and considerable toughness of mind. I only wish he had not let his preoccupations get in the way of his reading of my work. It is

perfectly legitimate to argue with and even denounce a writer's opinions, but surely it is desirable to get them right first. I'm still reeling from the wind of blows directed at heads to the left and right of my own.

LES A. MURRAY



Les A. Murray at the Australian Arts Festival, Aarhus, 1978.  
Photograph by Jørgen Therkildsen.

# Book Reviews

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Heterogeneous Worlds Yoked Violently Together: the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, 1979.

Gabriel Okara, *The Fisherman's Invocation*. Heinemann, 1978. 63 pages. £0.95.

Brian Turner, *Ladders of Rain*. John McIndoe, Dunedin, 1978. 63 pages. NZ\$4.95.

The Commonwealth Poetry Prize would be the only thing these two poets could ever share. Of Nigerian and New Zealand origin, respectively, they have totally different social backgrounds and, following that, different concerns materializing into different themes, and last, but to these two poets not least, they have very different natural backgrounds (climate, vegetation etc.) through which they can express their experiences. As the Commonwealth countries develop each in their own direction, the Commonwealth umbrella has to stretch further to keep everybody under its shade, and one wonders if it is not perhaps overstretching itself at times.

Although the prize is specifically for a first book of poetry, Gabriel Okara is already well-known both as a poet and as a novelist. His novel *The Voice* (1964) is a much read and much discussed book, chiefly because of its unique experimentation with language. Gabriel Okara tries to transfer the syntax and vocabulary of his native Ijaw directly into English in order to try to preserve the specific African content of his thinking. This reflects his deep-seated concern with traditional African values.

The importance of retaining values in a world governed by Western technology forms the major theme in Gabriel Okara's already published poetry, like the well-known anthology pieces 'Piano and Drums' and 'The Snowflakes Sail Gently Down'. The title poem of the collection also belongs to this previously published section of the book. It debates the relationship between the past and the present in traditional African imagery, rooted in oral literature. The concreteness of the images is powerful.

Your back's stump is not dead.  
 Deep down in the desert  
 there's water bubbling up to your roots  
 So draw, draw the Back  
 caught in the net into the canoe  
 and stretch forth your hands  
 into the face of the sun  
 and pluck down the essence  
 of the stump of your Back

Through this use of imagery the poem moves effortlessly between private, public and cosmic levels, never losing sight of the central idea. It is surely one of the best expressions of the literature of its kind.

The collection also includes a section of previously unpublished poems dealing with the Biafran war. Although Gabriel Okara was committed to the Biafran cause, the poems are non-political dealing with the horror of war. Gabriel Okara's voice is always personal and quiet, even when he deals with public issues, and this, combined with honesty of feeling and excellence of expression, makes his poetry a pleasure to read. 'Cancerous Growth' sums up these qualities:

#### CANCEROUS GROWTH

The noon sun  
 shrivels tender buds  
 today's wanton massacre  
 burns up tender words  
 and from the ashes  
 hate is growing, forcing its way  
 like mushroom through yielding soil  
 But it's an alien growth  
 a cancer that destroys its host.

Umuahia, 13 December 1968

Brian Turner's world of rain, wind, rock and snow is superbly at peace with itself. Set in a far-away rural part of New Zealand, it celebrates provincial life at its best: the quiet content with the predictability and stability of life without any trace of smugness. In 'Careys Bay' the townlet is described as





philosophy is not always a happy one. This, however, only mars slightly the success of this volume.

The contrast between the two poets is nowhere more striking than in their references to surroundings and their use of those references. Consider the contrast between the following two extracts:

I . . . go for walks  
over lucent snow, the earth longing  
to shed unwanted skin,  
hunched forests raked by squalls of rain.

(*Ladders of Rain*, p. 23)

The mystic drum beat in my inside  
and fishes danced in the rivers  
and men and women danced on land  
to the rhythm of my drum

(*The Fisherman's Invocation*, p. 26)

Heterogeneous worlds yoked violently together!

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN

Dambudzo Marechera, *The House of Hunger*. Heinemann, 1978. 154 pages. £1.25.

Dennis Brutus, *Stubborn Hope*. Heinemann, 1979. 97 pages. £0.95.

*The House of Hunger* is a somewhat lopsided collection of short stories, the title story taking up more than half of the collection. This 'awkward' length is not the only feature the main story shares with Alex La Guma's 'A Walk in the Night'. Set in the slums of the author's childhood it is a rambling description of incidents and places, only loosely connected by the first person narrator. Unlike 'A Walk in the Night' it does not even have a pretence of a plot, but like it it puts its main emphasis on vivid and detailed physical descriptions of slum conditions.

The slum world of Dambudao Marechera contains all the clichés in the book. A drunken father who beats the author mercilessly, a tough mother who gives him sex-education

You were late in getting off my breast; you were late in getting out of bedwetting. Now you're late jerking off into some bitch. You make me sick up to here, do you understand?

and a gallery of whores, thugs and hard-hitting, knife-throwing, dagga-smoking youths. Some of these youths are also schoolboys or students, and in this capacity they discuss with amazing insight the differences between Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Turgenev, Pushkin, Gorky, and finally settle for Gogol. When they tire of this, they beat each other to a pulp, or a paste or a stain. The author receives so many beatings of the following nature that he would surely have died long before he wrote the book, had they been true:

The tall one spat:

'Fuck shit!'

and caught me solidly on the jaw. I heard my dentures crack beneath the impact. I turned to run but the shorter one stuck out his foot and I fell heavily onto the paved path. They were kicking at my head. I was trying to spit out the fragments of my dentures.

... he grabbed me and yanked me hard against the low brick garden wall and began to smash my head into it. ... I smashed a fist through the window, cutting my wrist badly ... and he dragged me ... into the paved pathway where he thrashed me so much I blacked out, speechless.

After such beatings the author has his wounds stitched up, and those stitches become the scars on his mind:

My head seemed encased in a fiendish ice-hold; but when I explored with my hand, ripping off the bandages and feeling around the wet stinging wound, it was only the cold cold stitches they had used on the gash. Stitches enough to weave webs from the one wall of my mind to the wall of the House of Hunger.

Amazingly, the clichés come to life and reveal a considerable talent of the Bukowsky shit-sperm-and-spew variety:

There's just dirt and shit and urine and blood and smashed brains. There's dust and fleas and bloody whites and roaches and dogs trained to bite black

people in the arse. There's venereal disease and beer and lunacy and just  
cancers.

The violence of the language seems justified, and unlike La Guma March-  
era does not stop at naturalistic descriptions of the surface of things, but he uses  
the physical degradation of slum conditions as direct comments on mental  
states, sometimes with great effect:

The underwear of our souls was full of holes and the crotch it hid was  
infested with lice. We were whores; eaten to the core by the syphilis of the  
white man's coming. Masturbating onto a Playboy centrefold.

The shorter pieces are written in a less violent style, showing the author's  
ability to master different varieties of expression, and there is no doubt that this  
is a first book showing considerable talent.

On the titlepage *Snappers Hope* is described as 'new poems and selections from  
*China Poems and Strains*, but in the table of contents the largest section is called  
'poems collected for this edition'. At least half of those were written in South  
Africa; in other words this is mainly a collection of old or previously published  
poems, not a new book of poetry. This is borne out very much by the poetry  
itself; it centres on the same themes, has the same muted tones of tenderness  
and despair, and exhibits the same strengths and weaknesses as *A Simple Last*.  
The troubadour, the lover, the rebel and the seeker of peace in moments of  
beauty are all wellknown persons from *Sirens, Knuckle and Books*. Some poems  
seem very close in either theme or imagery or both, like

### IT IS WITHOUT THE OVERTONES

It is without the overtones  
of very cynicism  
— as I know you will understand —  
that I say  
I raise my eyes  
to the Abergavenny hills  
and find there some small easement

This poem echoes the feelings of 'This sun on this rubble after rain', but in a  
much lighter and inferior poetic expression, and a later poem, 'Again the rain-  
silvered asphalt', uses the imagery of 'This sun on this rubble after rain':

Again the rain-silvered asphalt  
a brilliant mirroring sheen . . .

to arrive at a familiar conclusion in the familiar shape of the rhyming couplet which ends a sonnet

...for these trophies these prices could be paid once again;  
one buys, for one's land, small hopes for much pain.

The collection is uneven and suffers from the same convoluted, overwritten style which occasionally mars *A Simple Last*, like the following lines

Profligate seminal milliards  
my ego's co-existences  
yearn with theftuous mortlity  
for acquisition of your other selves . . .

The collection also contains prison poems in the different, more prose-like and less poetic style of *Letters to Montila*, and poems about exile, loneliness and despair which fit into the 'In Exile' section of *A Simple Last*.

Although the book is enjoyable, it would seem to me a better idea to take the best poems from this collection and substitute them for the worst poems in *A Simple Last* and thus create a single volume of exquisite poetry rather than two volumes of uneven quality. I realize that this would exclude the China poems which are experiments in using the haiku form in the English language and which belong in an entirely different context of experimental poetry.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN

Errol Trzebinski, *Silence Will Speak*. Heinemann, London, 1977.  
348 pages. £7.50.

Denys Finch-Hatton: would the name or the person be remembered at all today if Karen Blixen had not described her relationship with him so movingly and so unforgettably in *Out of Africa*, her account of the seventeen years, from 1914-31, that she spent on a large farm in Kenya? The answer must surely be no. If ever a case existed where a person can be said to be indebted to an author for renown, even for immortality, here undoubtedly is one.

Until now, then, there seemed no question about who was indebted to whom; here, however, in Errol Trzechinski's book, *Silence Will Speak*, we have an attempt to redress the balance by seeking to demonstrate the great extent and fundamental importance of Denys Finch-Hatton's influence upon Karen Blixen's whole work as a writer. The attempt has, it must be said, only very limited success.

Errol Trzechinski has had access to the private papers of the Finch-Hatton family; she has read, one judges, all the major works on Karen Blixen and most of the minor ones as well; she has either met or corresponded with those people still alive who knew either Finch-Hatton or Karen Blixen; her book is crammed with details that make it absorbing reading; moreover, she has herself lived in Kenya for many years, and thus writes with an intimate knowledge of the background to their lives and relationship that continually lights up the story she has to tell. Finally, the aims of her book are very clear:

There is a twofold attempt in this biography of Denys Finch-Hatton. Firstly the aim is to cast a little more light on this elusive man whom Karen Blixen so deeply loved but about whom she has remained singularly reticent. Secondly it aims to elucidate and complete the palimpsest of her life by showing that even through the circumstances of his tragic death he was to serve posthumously as one of the most forceful catalysts in her development as a writer.

Having said that Errol Trzechinski by and large falls in these aims, one has to add straightaway, in all fairness, that the failure is by no means entirely her fault; a large part is due to the reticent nature of her material, and, in particular, to the character of Denys Finch-Hatton himself – 'this elusive man' as she aptly describes him. Again and again the word that recurs in the descriptions she quotes of Finch-Hatton by his contemporaries is that of 'charm', few if any can define it. Nor, it must be admitted, does Errol Trzechinski herself come much closer to pinning this elusive quality down when writing of him in terms like these:

His prowess was essentially masculine but his Byronic lustre made him irresistible. His poetic quality contrasted intriguingly with a masculine aggression and typically English flair for sang-froid in a dangerous situation. Courageous actions for which he became renowned in Africa were shrugged off casually, he never needed to raise his voice in anger: a word or look was enough.

In fact, Finch-Hatton's English upper-class background, his education at Eton and Oxford which bred the cool, assured, lofty attitude to others, the

interest in games, sports, and hunting, even most of the cultural pursuits, all these attributes were, after all, not so radically different from many of the other young men who emigrated to Kenya in the years before the First World War.

It is perhaps, however, in quoting from an obituary notice that Errol Trzebinski comes closest to his true nature: 'Denys always seemed to do everything he wanted to do and never do anything he did not want to do. Anyone else leading such a life would have deteriorated'. Not only does this single out a central feature in his character, it seems likely that it also points to the major reason for the final breakdown of the relationship between him and Karen Blixen. For an important contribution that this book makes to Karen Blixen studies is that it does establish a central fact. In *Out of Africa* the reader is left with the idea that what terminated the relationship between them was Finch-Hatton's tragic death when the plane he was piloting crashed only a short time before Karen Blixen left Kenya; in reality, however, this relationship had already come to an end some months before then.

It is important to stress this, since it is additional confirmation of an aspect of *Out of Africa* which has become increasingly apparent over the last few years. Instead of simply regarding the book as a straightforward autobiographical record of the years Karen Blixen spent in Kenya, it is really most fruitfully seen as an imaginative work of fiction which far outshadows all her tales and stories which are, indeed, all of them, fictitious – and avowedly so.

Why, however, did the relationship between these two break up? The answer, as Errol Trzebinski points out, must surely be looked for in their characters. Much evidence has accumulated over recent years of the well-nigh incredible degree of jealous possessiveness that Karen Blixen could display on occasions. It was her tragedy that in Kenya this possessiveness should be centred upon a man least likely of all to acquiesce in this. In her own words from *Out of Africa* 'he never did but what he wanted to do... he was happy on the farm; he came there only when he wanted to come'. Towards the end he no longer wanted to come – and therefore didn't. Thus he remained faithful to the central principle that seems to have guided his actions throughout his life. How one judges this, whether anyone even has the right to do so, remains a debatable point; some readers, however, may feel tempted to regard Denys Finch-Hatton a little more harshly than Errol Trzebinski does in her book.

The other major area that she is concerned with is that of the influence that Finch-Hatton exercised on Karen Blixen's work in general. She points out various characters in her tales who seem modelled upon him, and these all seem convincing enough examples. Where she is much less successful, however, is in claiming that Finch-Hatton's influence went far beyond these figures. For one of the surprising things about Karen Blixen's work is that, in reality, most of her ideas and beliefs were already firmly shaped and tenaciously held *before*

she left Denmark for Kenya and were expressed in various short stories that she wrote in Danish during her earlier years. Consequently, her years in Africa, and her friendship with Finch-Hatton, did not modify or alter these ideas to any essential degree, but really only served to enmesh her even more firmly in them.

It would, however, be ungrateful to end on this negative note. Errol Trzchinski has, in spite of this, succeeded in writing an absorbing and fascinating study of the man who probably meant more to Karen Blixen as a person than anyone else in her life. If only for that fact, one has every reason for strongly recommending this book to any reader who has experienced Karen Blixen's appeal as a writer.

DONALD W. HANNAH

Per Wästberg, *Afrika – en opgave. Refleksioner, beskrivelser, formodninger*. Gyldendal, Copenhagen, 1977. 254 pages. D.kr. 85.

In spite of his distinguished career as novelist, literary critic and newspaper editor in Stockholm, Per Wästberg's name for the Scandinavian public is probably most closely associated with Africa.

Wästberg's non-fiction works include *The Writer in Modern Africa* and two books about his impressions after a year's stay in Rhodesia, Nyasaland and South Africa in 1959. Since then, he says in the preface to his new book, he has almost every day been occupied with Africa in his thoughts and often in action. He has worked for foundations and on committees, been in contact with African friends, politicians and refugees, and travelled extensively in most of the new states south of the Sahara.

'When I first arrived in Africa in 1959', he writes, 'I knew much too little about Africa. Today it sometimes appears to me that I know too much to get a clear view'. Wästberg states that he loathes summaries, flexible conclusions, nicely wrapped truths. He prefers the fragments, the details, with no hope of being able to join them together into a whole. 'Travelling in Africa, I don't expect to find anything we call Africa, only separate parts streaming through it: People on the move, ideas circulating'.

Consequently *Afrika – en opgave* (*Africa – A Task*) is more a living impressionistic map of Africa, concentrated upon the eastern and southern parts of the continent, than anything like a textbook on African problems for the uninformed reader. The Swedish author is not easily surpassed in his ability to make people and milieus come alive in his descriptions of Africa: the drought-



stricken savanna, the sleepy town of Moshi in Tanzania, remnants of the colonial period at the Government Rest-House in the hush equipped with old copies of *Pand* or the Portuguese manager of a sugar factory in Mozambique, still a complete foreigner after a lifetime in Africa and while co-operating with the new FRELIMO government understanding not the first thing about the liberation movement or even about his black boy who has lived in his house for six years.

The descriptions are enough to make the book worthwhile reading for anyone, and it can only be deplored that Wästberg has not included his impressions of the more colourful West Africa.

But the book is much more. Luckily, despite his dislike of summaries and conclusions, Wästberg has not been able to avoid them. His views are, however, given in a cautious way: reflections, conjectures.

One chapter which comprises a campaign against colonial misconceptions recorded in older European literature seems to be among the more superfluous in the book, as the subject has been repeatedly written on since the early 1950s. In other chapters there are few short, but interesting observations about modern European writers. Wästberg the literary critic might well have elaborated a little more on what Graham Greene, Laurens van der Post, Nadine Gordimer and others have to say about Africa. Some of them seek the truth about ourselves in the 'mysterious' continent. Others, like Alberto Moravia, have some doubtful generalisations about Africans being born easy victims to capitalist manipulations.

Wästberg also dissociates himself from modern marxist or dogmatic marxist-inspired patent solutions or explanations of the situation in Africa today. He describes the rhetoric of the 'super' leftists among Tanzanian students as unable to distinguish between reality and wishful thinking. For them, Western capitalism is a gigantic conspiracy, directed from Wall Street and easily overthrown by suppressed masses under a small group of revolutionaries. They are unable to understand the adaptability of the Western system and the differences between the USA and for instance Sweden with its mixed economy.

Wästberg is clearly whole-heartedly for the gradual socialist revolution in Tanzania under the careful leadership of Nyerere with his realistic idealism. After the book was published it has, however, been generally acknowledged that Tanzania's policy of rural collectivisation has been abandoned as a failure. The peasantry proved unwilling to produce under socialist conditions and villagisation without socialism is the current policy. The revolutionary development in Mozambique occupies a large part of the book. Wästberg relates his discussions with Eduardo Mondlane, long since murdered but once the powerful leader of FRELIMO, which fought the long war of liberation against the Portuguese. Unlike Régis Debray and other revolutionaries of the Third World, Mondlane held the view that political instruction and education of the

peasants must precede the armed fight against the colonial oppressors. The new nationalism must grow out of close agreement and co-operation between the educated and the masses. The peasants must experience a material benefit from the liberation.

During visits to Mozambique in 1975 and 1976 Wästberg tried to assess the results of the liberation war fought along these lines. In 1975 he was filled with optimism. Most African countries are characterized by elitist governments, corruption and foreign economic dominance. 'In Mozambique I have no doubts about the will to justice and the removal of class distinction . . . But', as Wästberg remarks after a visit in 1976, 'FRELIMO carries out it's radical program so fast that it shocks as well as impresses . . . Resistance is growing to a more and more centrally directed policy, formulated by a principally anonymous politburo'. Wästberg remembers that Mondlane warned against party-elitist dictatorship after independence. His pessimism dissolves more or less when he visits the villages, where a new and better Mozambique is thriving.

For poor agricultural states like Mozambique and Tanzania it is comparatively easy to experiment with new patterns of societies and – given the necessary aid – build new nations. President Kaunda in Zambia also has his vision of a future, but he is a prisoner of economic realities that he cannot control. The elite in Tanzania has not much to lose in trying a radical policy. The situation in Zambia, with its mineral riches, expatriates, greedy elite, class distinctions and failure of agricultural reforms to appear, is more typical of most African states.

Wästberg has not much to say about these 'typical' states which makes the book one-sided, taken as an evaluation of the African situation as a whole. Wästberg does emphasize that although the colonial period left the African states in a deplorable situation, the new elite has a growing responsibility for the fact that nothing or next to nothing happens in many countries. But he clearly prefers to deal with the states where something is happening.

With these limitations *Afrika – en öppen* is easily the best written, most versatile among newer Scandinavian books about Africa. That many of his clever observations are hidden unimpressively in the text only serves to emphasize that 'the truth' about Africa for Europeans is more elusive than ever before.

SVEN POULSEN

Obaro Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria: The British Conquest*. Heinemann, 1977. 292 pages. Csd. £5.50, paper £2.70.

Since the publication in 1956 of *Trade and Politics in The Niger Delta* by the Nigerian historian K. O. Dike, Nigerians have increasingly taken over the research of the history of pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria. They have questioned old theories and views and provided new and more satisfactory analyses of, for instance, the events just before and during the British conquest of Nigeria 1885-1914. Many of these new works are highly specialized. The result is that undergraduates in Nigerian universities have had to read at least ten monographs and a sizable number of articles to get an overall Nigerian view of the British conquest. Consequently, in *The Fall of Nigeria* professor Obaro Ikime, University of Ibadan, has brought together much of the available material on this subject providing both the students and the interested general reader with an accessible synthesis of existing work. The book is divided into two parts of which the first (about 80 pages) presents the analysis and arguments while the second more popular part brings twelve episodes from the British conquest: The Fall of Lagos, Benin, the Tiv, Kano etc.

On the whole the British occupation of the various territories in West Africa caused fewer military clashes than the French. The Yoruba states in the 1880s were characterized by war weariness and diverging interests. Ibadan and Abeokuta strove to open up regular trade with Lagos while others, anxious to play the role of middlemen in the trade, would do anything to block Ibadan's route to Lagos. Here and elsewhere African politics played into the hands of the British by providing them with enemies which they could play against each other. Those who tried to support the British soon found that the Europeans gradually took power from them, while those who tried to be independent invariably were bombarded into submission.

Ikime raises the question why so many Nigerian rulers willingly signed protection treaties and points out among other things, that in many instances there were no interpreters able to translate the legal English jargon of the treaties into the Nigerian languages. Some of the interpreters simply were afraid to tell their rulers that they were yielding up their sovereignty.

Most readers will probably prefer the second part of the book which brings into focus some of the most dramatic events in Nigerian history such as The Benin Massacre in 1897, which was not, writes the author, the murder of a few Englishmen, but the subsequent British attack on Benin. The second part also brings a good deal of quite new material, especially on the resistance of the Tiv. The first part seems rather condensed and at least for students may require additional reading.

The book within its somewhat unusual framework is filling a wide gap. It tells a story worth telling in an engaged and scholarly manner. There are no footnotes but ample bibliographical notes.

SVEN POULSEN

Eckhard Breiting, ed., *Black Literature*. Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München, 1979. 372 pages. DM 36.00.

If you expect this to be a survey of black literature in English you are mistaken. It is in German, and it is just another mixed bag of essays that do not cover the whole spectrum of black writing: there are no essays on drama and poetry, on East and South African writing, on literatures in Portuguese or any African languages, on the French Caribbean, etc.

The book opens with a forty-page overview of African, West Indian and Afro-American literature by Eckhard Breiting. This is followed by a section on Africa. There is an essay by sociologist Gerhard Grohs on models of cultural decolonization. Jürgen Bencke contributes the almost obligatory essay on Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Breiting writes on another member of the 'pioneer brigade', Tutuola. Jürgen Schüler also covers a lot of familiar territory in his survey of Anglophone African writing. His theoretical considerations are pertinent, there are good analyses of specific authors and works, and above all Schüler writes very well. But the latest book he discusses was published in 1968 and since then a lot of new material has come out of Africa. That he omits all this gives his essay a somewhat dated look. Two of the best pieces, in my opinion, come from Marlis Hellinger and Barbara Ischinger. Hellinger gives a concise and very readable account of the different forms of English used by black writers, from Standard English to Creole. Ischinger gives an interesting survey of trends in Francophone African writing, giving far more emphasis to modern developments than to négritude (but she omits drama). Ischinger pleads for more co-operation between students of Anglophone and Francophone African writing.

The Afro-American section consists of three essays, one on autobiographies from Douglass to Cleaver (Heiner Bus), one on Jean Toomer (Udo O. H. Jung) and one on Richard Wright (Kurt Otten). The only essay dealing with the West Indies comes from Gordon Collier. He gives what he calls an analytical metatext of Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* and compares Brathwaite with Walcott.

It is a fine critical reading and the comparison of the two poets offers new insights. It is, therefore, a pity that this essay is marred by unidiomatic and ungrammatical German. Would it not have been the editor's duty to throw out the most egregious errors?

There are other instances of rather careless editing. Why are four different methods of citing references used in this volume (two of which are clearly inadequate)? And there is no uniformity in other matters: some contributors quote English originals, others German translations. Some words occur in two spellings (e.g. Swaheli/Swahili, Ibo/Igbo, James Ngugi/Ngugi wa Thiong'o). Why did nobody correct the irritating mistakes in syllabification (e.g. hroo-her, wis-hin, so-mehow, bloods-hed, etc.)? Why are so many names misspelled (e.g. Harry Bloom, Mphahlele, Ernest Gaines, André Gide, Arthur Nortje, etc.)? The selective bibliography seems, like most bibliographies do, lopsided. There are no references to primary sources – apart from some thirty titles in the West Indian section. There are six pages devoted to both Africa and the West Indies, but only two to Afro-American Writing, two pages to Achebe and half a page to Wright. And there are some strange omissions (e.g. eds. King & Ogunghesam, *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*, New York 1975; Ranchand, *An Introduction to the Study of West Indian Literature*, Sunbury-on-Thames 1976; Fahre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, New York 1973 – to name a few at random).

KLAUS STUCKERT

Dick Harrison, *Unnamed Country. The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction*. The University of Alberta Press, 1977. 250 pp. C\$12.50.

In his preface Dick Harrison points out that he wants to go beyond two well-known studies of Canadian prairie fiction, i.e. Edward McCourt's *The Canadian West in Fiction* (1970) and Lawrence Ricou's *Vertical Man/Horizontal Man* (1973). Both discuss the problems that are connected with an imaginative transformation of prairie landscape and reality.

Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country* emphasises in particular how European and Eastern Canadian norms tended to prevent the settler from establishing a close relationship with his unique environment, the prairie; in the process he offers a wide-ranging survey of Canadian prairie literature and history. He shows by an abundance of references how explorers, travellers, and artists saw

the prairie and recorded their impressions. On the whole they offer a distorted picture of the prairie and its history for the artistic tools of Europe were inadequate when it came to recording the enormity of prairie landscape and climate. Up to around 1925-6 the prairie was first of all seen through romantic glasses both in fiction and in painting (the volume includes a number of well-chosen paintings to illustrate this point).

It is thought-provoking to know that the influx of immigrants was at its highest level ever during a period when the prairie was looked upon by outsiders as an innocent fertile Eden just waiting for cultivation. Harrison points out that settlers nursed on such romantic ideas and nurtured by the C. P. R. and the Union Trust Co. in their sales drive abroad were badly prepared for the tough realities of the prairie.

Canadian painters were the first to record a realistic view of the prairie, and by the mid-1920s novelists such as Martha Ostenso and Grove reflect a new attitude towards the prairie experience. These writers and others like Ross and McCourt reject the Edenic myth and show us man in all his inadequacy in an alien and hostile environment. Outside the universities and related circles these realists never reached an audience like the one addicted to a 'Kodachrome' version of pioneering and Mountie adventure. The latter elements are discussed in ch. VI, 'Adventure Romance and Sentimental Comedy'. Harrison's final chapter, 'Renaming the Past' is on contemporary prairie fiction. He traces a new tendency shared by writers like Margaret Laurence, Rudy Wiebe and Robert Kroetsch to peel away artificial and false prairie lore and start a 're-naming process' true to the facts of prairie life and history. Such a process will certainly include a revaluation of the prairie Indians and the Metis.

In my opinion Dick Harrison has written the best introduction to Canadian prairie literature so far. It combines survey and well-researched details in a masterly way. Such a work with its thorough and complete bibliography will no doubt become an indispensable manual for students and scholars in that field.

JØRN CARLSEN

Noel Hilliard, *Selected Stories*. McIndoe, Dunedin, 1977. 132 pp. NZ\$4.95.

O. E. Middleton, *'Confessions of an Ocelot' and 'Not for a Seagull'*. McIndoe, Dunedin, 1979. 116 pp. NZ\$5.95.

O. E. Middleton, *Selected Stories*. McIndoe, Dunedin, 1975. 194 pp. NZ\$4.95.

Roderick Finlayson, *Other Lovers*. McIndoe, Dunedin, 1976. 136 pp. NZ\$4.95.

It is no coincidence that the four volumes under review all come from the same publisher. Within a very few years John McIndoe has developed a formidable reputation and has made a permanent contribution to the task of bringing New Zealand's more serious fiction and poetry to their audience. Clearly and unpretentiously printed on off-white paper, which is easy to look at and pleasant to handle, these volumes do visual justice to the high standard of the books' contents.

All of the writers represented here are established literary figures, and the books offer an opportunity to reconsider their work rather than to make new discoveries. The stories in Noel Hilliard's book, for example, have all appeared in book form before, being selected from two previous volumes. They permit us, however, to appreciate more clearly than ever before the wide range of themes which Hilliard's talent embraces. His fame as an exponent of modern Maori life, based on his novels, has perhaps tended to obscure the fact that even in those a series of vignettes offers a broad picture of Pakeha life as well. That his portrait of New Zealand is double-sided is more obvious in the *Selected Stories*.

Technically, like most members of the New Zealand mainstream, Hilliard tends towards the conservative. His narrative is finely controlled, but it is often pre-Mansfield in its concentration on telling rather than revealing. Occasional experiments nonetheless occur, the most consistent being 'The Absconder', a monologue in 'illiterate' English punctuated only with paragraph markings.

Hilliard's greatest weakness is his tendency to explicit moralising, which interrupts the narrative flow and causes the reader's suspension of disbelief to crumble. Sometimes ('A Piece of Land', 'Looking the Part') the stories are virtually exemplary anecdotes, and this sits uncomfortably with the otherwise consistently naturalistic style. (This tendency even mars the last pages of *Maori Girl*.) 'Erua' is in this respect a flawed masterpiece. It is such an effective in-depth portrait of a Maori schoolchild that Hilliard outdoes himself on his own special ground, but the twist at the end rubs in the 'moral' at the expense of suddenly reducing the complexity of vision. Erua's social isolation has already become clear so that his explicit disillusionment with the teacher is really a kind of tautology.

In my view, Hilliard's most successful story is 'Friday Nights are Best', where the moral complexity is not reduced to a precept at the end. The story is almost a compendium of traditional New Zealand themes, which it synthesises very skillfully: isolation, both physical and mental; closeness to nature; manual labour as a virtue; mateship; the value of 'hard' individuals in contrast to 'soft'

civilization; the outbacks as a source of strength and virtue. These themes can, of course, add up to a set of values which are inhumane because they stifle spontaneity and aesthetic sensibility – this is the burden of Middleton's and Finlayson's books, not to mention those of Frank Sargeson. But Hilliard is able to combine them here with the outstanding virtue of the other writers: humane sympathy for the unfortunate and misunderstood. Curiously, one of the few traditional themes not touched in 'Friday Nights' is Hilliard's 'own' theme of Maori-Pakeha relationships. Otherwise, it is so inclusive that it would be an interesting point for a teacher to begin, when introducing New Zealand literature to his students for the first time.

In his two long stories 'Ocelot' and 'Seagull', O. E. Middleton applies a narrative point of view which is in danger of becoming a cliché in New Zealand: that of a narrator participating in the story's events and under necessity to pass on more information to the reader than he, with his limited powers of perception, is actually aware of. This is the method characteristic of Sargeson and employed with the skill of a virtuoso in Ian Cross's *The God Beg*. Middleton, for all his talent, is no virtuoso – one might even say that he is too warmly human to breathe the cold thin air of the virtuoso's heights. He awakens the reader's sympathy for his outsider non-heroes, but even in the midst of sympathy one must question the technique of some passages. In 'Ocelot' the narrator is witness of a theft in a bookshop without realising that this is so. If he were to fully understand what is happening this could breach his essential innocence in the reader's mind. Nonetheless all the details of the theft are reported, even laboriously reported, and the reader cannot help wondering why the narrator observes so closely and reports so faithfully what he apparently cannot interpret. To pick out this moment of weakness in a splendid story would be mere carping were it not that it illustrates a danger in a narrative mode which has become common in New Zealand. This is not to deny that there are excellent reasons for its commonness – the highly sophisticated author does not wish to seem patronising to his bewildered, intellectually groping protagonist and deliberately reduces the range of narrative vision – an act of almost heroic discipline on the writer's part.

A further danger is that the author's range of social awareness may seem to be reduced with the narrative perspective, but this can be compensated by setting one story against another. For this reason 'Seagull' is a necessary complement to 'Ocelot'. The Maori protagonist here offers a very different view of Auckland from that of the Pakeha, somewhat effeminate narrator of 'Ocelot'. Both, however, experience established society and its values as oppressive. The 'seagull' runs away from an isolated fisherman's hut to the city, hoping to increase the range of his experience. He does so, but not all his experiences are pleasant ones. He confronts racism and brutality, especially in the police, but



he also establishes a tender relationship to a white girl. The sense that this relationship is endangered by the emotional bluntness of 'society' is a point of connection between these stories and those of Finlayson reviewed below. Both of Middleton's stories are remarkable – and in the New Zealand context precious – for the author's powers of empathy. Both struggle, however, at the edge of technical downfall. The precarious nature of the narrative perspective is one aspect of this; another is the self-consciousness of the symbolism (e.g. the odorous plant which suddenly loves its odour in 'Seagull'), which is no less at odds with the naturalistic style than Hilliard's moralising is.

This also endangers some of Middleton's *Selected Stories*. Indeed the rats in 'The Greaser's Story' partake of Hilliard's weakness no less than of Middleton's own; they are at once moralising and self-consciously symbolic – 'I still think sometimes of Johnson from Liverpool who made us see the danger of rats until you get together and wipe them out, once and for all...' On the other hand the soaring model planes in 'The Man Who Flew Models' do seem appropriate. This is because they are integrated with other elements of the story. The character of the German schoolteacher is drawn in such a way that the planes seem to externalise an essential aspect of his inner nature which could not find expression in words or in any other action. Johnson in 'The Greaser's Story' is less evenly and consistently drawn. Perhaps what seems to be a weakness in the symbolism is really in the characterization. In any case, one story harmonises symbol and character, the other does not.

O. E. Middleton has long been recognised as a master of the short story, but it is perhaps only now, with his *Selected Stories* before us, that the full extent of his accomplishment can be realised. His sympathy for the underdog has always been apparent: sometimes all of the characters seem to be victims, none of them victimisers. But what astonishing variety there is within this basic theme! Middleton's oppressed come from many walks of life and from several countries: schoolboys, the unemployed, political exiles, wharflies, seamen, prisoners, a German woman struggling with her national heritage, an injured English miner – our sympathy is invited for all people who strive to maintain human dignity in adversity, but, unlike Hilliard, Middleton rarely turns this invitation into a command. The typical ending of a Middleton story is not a precept but an image of human aspiration.

Like Hilliard, however, Middleton provides an interplay of typically New Zealand themes. To those listed above might be added the theme of childhood and adolescence. H. M. Holcroft has discussed this topos in *Grassless Islands* (1970). It could well be that the child's groping towards an understanding of the world he finds himself in is perceived by writers as a metaphor for the Pakeha's groping towards an understanding of the islands he lives in. The fact that these islands superficially resemble that West European island where his

cultural tradition originated makes his confusion over their fundamental difference all the greater. This seems to be confirmed by Middleton's story 'First Adventure', where the confused responses of the protagonist are as much due to his Europeanness as to his childhood, the two being inseparable. Billy is troubled that the old Maori skeleton recently found is not neatly stored, out of sight out of mind, in a cemetery as European skeletons are. Why, he wonders, is it so naturally a part of the land which the European is breaking into with his spade?

The notion that the Maori is more truly a New Zealander than the Pakeha because he is more closely bound to the land itself is central to Roderick Finlayson's perception of his country. In the blurb to *Other Lozen* the publisher points out that 'these three stories are linked by their views of love and/or marriage', but this is only the surface theme. Behind the love affairs, disturbing them, and in two of the cases destroying them, is a darker problem: the psychological injury perpetrated on sensitive but underprivileged individuals by the puritanical self-righteousness of New Zealand's established social values.

The love of a very old man and a very young girl is a difficult subject and a dangerous one in any society, but Finlayson masters it in 'Frankie and Lena' with tact, sympathy and literary finesse. Not the lovers, who are united by their surprising innocence despite the superficial disparity of their worldly experience, but the sturdy pillars of the farming community, where repressed passions are jolted into ugly openness by the elopement, prove to be unnatural and puritan. Yet even they earn some of the narrator's – and the reader's – sympathy, because their natures are not inherently evil but simply warped through their imperceptive acceptance of a set of dreary social conventions.

The combination of detestation for accepted values and limited sympathy for those whose blindness leads them to accept them is common to both Finlayson and Middleton. And just as Middleton relieves the darkness of this view with a story of deep parental affection and the understanding it receives ('A Married Man'), Finlayson allows a more positive note to enter in 'Tom and Sue', a story of adolescent love and marriage. Even here, however, it is implied that success in love is only possible after a conflict with the crudeness of one's neighbours and the crudeness within, which has been inculcated by one's New Zealand upbringing.

Finally, in his most complex treatment of the theme, 'Jim and Miri', Finlayson returns to the subject-matter which brought him some modest fame: the clash of cultural values between Maori and Pakeha. This is for Finlayson a cultural rather than a racial issue. It is, one might say, a question of the rhythm of living, the Maori adapting the rhythm of his daily life to that of the place he lives in, the Pakeha creating an environment to match his rhythm by building cities, in which he can live partly independent of the natural world. In 'Jim and Miri' this is the predominating theme; the love story merely illustrates it in one

of several ways. Ultimately it is the major theme of all three writers discussed here. To some extent it merely continues a contrast which is common to all literatures – the contrast of city and country. But here it is given a special flavour by the fact that country (Maori) implies a long tradition of adaptation to the land, while town (Pakeha) is a short sharp attack with the will to make the land do the adapting.

These three writers are only a part of that sound body of craftsmen who testify to the health of New Zealand literature. Whether they testify to the health of New Zealand society is another, more difficult question.

NELSON WATTIE

Margaret Orbell, ed., *Maori Poetry*. Heinemann Educational Books, Auckland, 1978. 104 pages. NZ\$3.85.

With this collection of Maori poetry, Margaret Orbell gives us a glimpse of a culture and a way of life very different from our own European one. Traditional Maori poetry – like music, dancing, and sculpture – was a part of the fabric of life, an essential means of expression and communication. In Maori society language was always experienced as a part of lived reality and words were considered to be a form of action. Thus poetry provided the people with an outlet and a means of asserting themselves. Poems were sung or recited during tribal meetings and celebrations, at religious ceremonies, in the daily routine of work as well as during the crises of life and death.

The imagery of the poems is subtle and rich, and many of the images indicate a union between two phenomena which are believed actually to exist; so that light, for example, is associated with life and success, and darkness with death and failure, as becomes obvious in the following poem where the triumph of light over darkness is metaphorical of success in battle:

#### SONG OF BATTLE

I am striking, you are striking  
Whence comes my weapon  
Strong in battle? From ancient times!  
Poroku, my club, moves fast!  
Its thong was tied in darkness

That my eyes might be like stars!  
Aue! It is day, ee!

Many of the poems in this anthology are – in various ways – concerned with themes of separation and loss and more often than not with death – the final separation. Thus it may seem as if Maori poetry in general is inspired not by success and happiness but by sorrow and defeat. The love poetry usually laments the loss of the beloved, expressing the grief of the lover as in 'Oh I am torn with fear':

...  
Clouds, farewell! Remain up there alone!  
I am gone with the descending current,  
The sun disappearing at the river mouth at Kapenga,  
To my lover dead of disease, for whom my heart cries out!  
Oh he is here! He grasps me, comes close!

After finishing the anthology the reader is left with a vivid sense of Maori thoughts and sentiments and a rich experience of a totally different way of life. Though – for obvious reasons – it is impossible for me to assess the quality of the translations, it seems to me that Margaret Orbell succeeds in conveying the pulse of Maori life and the richness of Maori experience. Moreover she succeeds in making the poems accessible and easily comprehensible to a non-Maori readership by her lucid introduction and the useful explanatory notes preceding each section of the anthology.

It is noteworthy that the Maori people, in spite of pressures from the Pakeha (white settlers), have kept their individuality and have been able to retain much of their own culture. Margaret Orbell's book is a valuable contribution to a deeper understanding of the Maori way of life and will no doubt arouse an increasing interest in Maori culture which one can only hope will continue to make its mark and come to have influence on New Zealand's way of life.

ANNEMARIE BACKMANN

Edward Baugh, *Derek Walcott. Memory as Vision: Another Life*. Critical Studies of Caribbean Writers, gen. ed. Mervyn Morris. Longman, London, 1978. 85 pp. £4.95.

Henry James suggests that the good critic is 'a trenching outsider, the interpreter, the brother' of the artist, and Edward Baugh is most of these to Derek Walcott. And yet, there are some points of dissatisfaction with the book; most of them, I fancy, have to do with what I take to be Dr Baugh's brief. I will come to this; but let me suggest that this study will be the first to which we should turn when beginning to assess the scholarship building up around Walcott. Not only is it the first monograph study of the poet, it is also by a student of literature whose judgement we have grown to value.

But what is *Derek Walcott*? It is not a study of the Walcott canon as we have it at this point in time and yet it raises those large issues crucial to an understanding of the poet: myth/history, art/life, home, painting, the journey.... It is, as we learn from the small print on the title-page, a study of *Another Life*, and it is a fine introductory essay to that notable poem.

Dr Baugh's approach is to let his subject dictate the form of the essay, so that, after an introductory chapter covering essential biographical background (Baugh is no voyeur) and detailing influences, the remaining four chapters correspond to the four books of *Another Life*. But the method emulates Walcott's poem more finely and subtly than this, for, just as we sense the presence of so much that Walcott has written behind *Another Life*, so Baugh echoes, anticipates, or alludes to other poems by Walcott or sets in motion central thematic concerns of the study. Once he has launched these themes we find him, in subsequent chapters, deftly adding to or filling them out. In the ambience of the first chapter, then, we sense poems like 'Royal Palms', 'Ruins of a Great House', 'Roots', 'Sea Chantey', and 'A Far Cry from Africa', in addition to Walcott's biographical essays 'Meanings' and 'Leaving School' which are referred to in the chapter. At times, however, the approach becomes almost too epigrammatic (e.g. the discussion of silence launched on p. 27 and linking 'Choc Bay' to *Another Life*, pp. 13 and 148, could have been extended usefully by reference to Walcott's deepened pre-occupation with silence in *Sea Grapes*). But the only really awkward moment in the approach is the fracture in the absorbing discussion of history. Baugh commences this discussion on p. 42 but on p. 48 it is suspended until he treats Chapter 22 some twenty-five pages later.

*Derek Walcott* is a short study (c. 22,000 words) but occasionally Baugh offers us glimpses of his eloquent and sensitive reading. Among others, I have in mind his treatment of the crab metaphor, his elaboration on 'the moment of Sauteurs', or the 'idealising of Anna' where, while the discussion remains compressed, it has a rich metaphoric quality to it, at once, picking up resonances and setting others in motion. This is not always the case, and the discussion of influences in Chapter 1 is severely truncated. There is perhaps, a place in the chapter for a consideration of literary influences (clearing some of the critical detritus on the way). What of Walcott's feeling for Hemingway's prose? Does not this shed some light on his ideas about the relationship bet-

ween poetry and prose? What is Walcott's interest in Neruda, in O'Hara? But it is a short study and we feel often that Baugh is on short rein.

In spite of this, Dr Baugh catches well the energy of Walcott's poetry, its richness and fine tensions, the paradox and ambiguity that underwrites it but which is always subordinate to the naming and praising of his place and fundamental folk.

The book does not have an index, nor does it need one, but it does include a useful select bibliography of primary and secondary sources, one of which I look forward to reading: Craven's *Treasury*.

JAMES WIELAND

Stephen Alter, *Neglected Lives*, Andre Deutsch, 1978. 179 pages. £4.95.

"Why should we let our grandfathers interrupt us with their history?" Lionel's Indian girlfriend asks. But for Lionel the position is not so simple; whether he likes it or not he cannot escape his grandfathers for Lionel is an Eurasian. At the age of ten he asks his mother the harshed question, "Mother, what am I, Indian or English?". The book explores Lionel's attempt to answer this question and to come to terms with his mixed heritage.

After his Indian girl friend becomes pregnant and her brothers attempt to murder him, Lionel is forced to seek refuge with an old friend of his parents, Brigadier Augden, who lives in Dehrakot, which was once a flourishing hill station but is now almost completely deserted except for a few elderly Anglo-Indians. The decaying, disintegrating hill station is a painful reminder to the community of their own situation.

*Neglected Lives* is not just Lionel's story, woven into the fabric of the story and his life are the stories and lives of the Anglo-Indian community of Dehrakot. Each one of them tells of his or her own life, the desperate attempts to pass as English, the failure and despair of someone in no-man's land, a despair and bitterness summed up in the words of Mrs Augden, "I'm like a mule. Cross bred and sterile".

Stephen Alter is an American citizen but he was born and has spent almost all his life in India where he is still living. This is his first novel and it is at times obviously a young man's book. There is a tendency towards the melodramatic, the characterization and relationships between the young people are not particularly well handled, and the symbolism of Lionel's and Sylvia's marriage

and the new road is perhaps a little obvious and possibly a facile solution to the problem.

But these are small points when one considers his strengths; his ability to tell a story, his insight into the characters of the elderly Anglo-Indians, his sympathetic portrayal of these 'neglected lives' without any touch of sentimentality. There is humour, but it is a humour of understanding and love, not condescension.

The plight of the Eurasian in India has not attracted the attention of many writers – we find them in John Masters' *Banquani Junction* – but this novel of Stephen Aler's is the first serious attempt to deal with the dilemma of these people.

*Neglected Lives* is not just a good first novel, it is a good novel and I look forward to his next.

ANNA RUTHERFORD

Michael Wilding, *The Phallic Forest*, Wild & Woolley, 1978. 139 pages. A\$3.95.

Michael Wilding, ed., *The Tabloid Story Reader*, Wild & Woolley, 1978. 320 pages. A\$3.95.

Brian Kiernan, ed., *The Most Beautiful Lies*, Angus & Robertson, 1977. 247 pages. £4.95.

In 1968 I read a typescript of Michael Wilding's story 'The Phallic Forest' and enjoyed it for the way in which it accepted the human proclivity to fantasize, and entered into it with wit and understanding. At the time, the conflation of the fantastic and the mimetic seemed very experimental, but the story came off because of the author's control of tone, his lightness of touch and precision of language. There is a natural, seamless bond between its theme and its innovative narrative method which should have been enough to assure its publication. But in fact, it was censored from the author's first collection.

Its publication now by Wild and Woolley indicates how the situation has changed in Australian writing in the decade or more since the story was written, not just in a greater readiness to accept its subject – for 'The Phallic Forest' could never have been fairly considered obscene or pornographic; it is a sexual

comedy, and it is impossible to deprave and corrupt comically – but in the evolution of short fiction and the related developments in publishing which have accompanied it. As writer, editor and publisher, Michael Wilding has played a central role in this process.

His latest collection, *The Plastic Forest*, includes pieces from most of his career, and illustrates both his own evolution and, synecdochally, that of short fiction in the current decade. The title story (not the earliest collected here) marks a stage in the author's process of liberating himself from the conventions of formal realism, (for too long imposed upon short fiction by the dominance of the novel) to allow a distinctive 'voice and narrative stance to come through more clearly. This opens rich possibilities for exploring the themes and preoccupations which sustain his recent fiction. One is the characteristic brand of sexual comedy, which takes its origin, perhaps, in the anxieties charted in an early story like 'Don't Go Having Kittens', but which in later work acquires a kind of aesthetic independence. These stories of sex and sexual fantasy do not operate primarily in the interest of psychological realism, but grow out of the exploration and ordering of the artistic potential in fantasy itself. Cognate with this is a recognition of the power of fiction, to which all of us have recourse in our attempts to establish dominance over others and control parts of our 'reality'. Both the sexual and the political dimensions of his work are wittily and compassionately exemplified in 'The Numbatal Story', collected here and also in the anthology of pieces from *Tabloid Story*, where it first appeared.

In *The Tabloid Story Pocket Book* Michael Wilding has collected most of the stories which appeared in the periodical, under his editorship with Frank Moorhouse, Carmel Kelly and Brian Kiernan. This history of this venture is recalled in the tailpiece to this collection. All that need be said here is that it succeeded entirely in its aim of revitalizing short fiction in Australia. Far outweighing the occasional tedious or pretentious effusion, inevitable in such an assemblage, is the mass of original, exciting and varied writing. Some of these new voices have an authentic strangeness which almost certainly would never have been heard, had it not been for the encouraging policies of the *Tabloid Story* editors.

*Tabloid Story* and the two or three small presses which came into operation at about the same time have been largely responsible for enriching and strengthening the tradition of short fiction in Australia. Paradoxically, the editors began the project as a response to what they felt was a narrow and stifling conception of the 'Australian story' dominant in the traditional magazines and anthologies and called for a more 'international' outlook on the part of writers, editors and readers, yet what they revealed, and to a large extent stimulated, was the vitality and diversity of the short story in Australia.



The writing in *The Tabloid Story Pocket Book* and in Brian Kiernan's collection *The Most Beautiful Lies* is certainly very eclectic, often conceived without respect for The Australian Legend, yet for all that, distinctly Australian in fresh and varied ways. Neither in Britain nor the United States has there been a comparable resurgence of short fiction. Some of Australia's most important and promising writers are now short story writers. *Tabloid Story* played a central role in fostering this development.

All this happened during the period of crisis documented in James Sutherland's *Fiction and the Fiction Industry* (London, 1978) when traditional outlets for new fiction in Britain, and consequently in Australia, which remains a colonial market for British publishing, began to dry up. *Tabloid Story* and the small presses Wild and Woolley and Outback Press represent the efforts of writers doing the whole job themselves, by creating an alternative to the fiction industry on a small, sometimes collective scale, in touch with the actual craft of writing.

This has determined some of the changes observable in recent Australian fiction: the short, highly finished story, the collection of clustered pieces; the extended work structured according to the principles Frank Moorhouse calls 'discontinuous narrative'. These are positive developments full of great potential, for short fiction, freed of the dominance of the novel and the narrow tradition of the 'Australian story' is capable of great variety and refinement, and story clusters or discontinuous narratives have all the potential of the novel without its inherent tolerance for boredom. As the fiction industry, dominated by international publishers who treat Australia as a cultural colony, becomes closed to writers starting out on their careers, it is increasingly likely that new and innovative fiction – the work, in fact, upon which the strength and survival of literary culture depends – will come through the alternative avenues of publication, and take the forms which they encourage.

In Australia, this process is well begun. The five writers selected by Brian Kiernan – Michael Wildgen, Frank Moorhouse, Peter Carey, Murray Bail and Morris Lurie – have all been connected with *Tabloid Story* or the small presses (including the University of Queensland paperback prose series) and they must be considered among the most important writers of their generation. Their experiments and innovations in form and mode promise to nourish Australian fiction for some time to come. They are not alone, of course. There are good young novelists, and other short story writers of great originality, like Vicki Viidikas, Laurie Clancy, Angela Kervishanos, Brian Cole and Christine Townsend, among others who found an audience through *Tabloid Story*. It is to publications like this to which the reader must turn to discover the resurgent vitality of Australian fiction.

BRUCE CLUNIES ROSS

# Conferences

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## The Ibadan Workshop on Radical Perspectives of African Literature and Society, University of Ibadan, 18-22 December 1977.

The creation in 1975 of *The Association of African Critics* seems to have given new impetus to the restless endeavours of West African intellectuals. This is particularly true of Nigerian academic circles which have been, as it were, engulfed in intense activity since that historical event.

Of the major literary events that have taken place in Nigeria since 1975, *The Ibadan Workshop on Radical Perspectives of African Literature and Society* held in 1977 has particular significance for the future of African literature and politics. Owing to its exclusive focus on the centrality of radicalism in both the critical appraisal of African literature and the evaluation of the achievements of contemporary African societies, this Workshop has indeed pointed the way to a new nexus between literature and politics.

The Workshop was held in The Conference Centre of the University of Ibadan under the joint auspices and chairmanship of left-wing intellectuals who were soon identified as 'The Ibadan-Ife Group'. They were

From the University of Ibadan:

Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, G. G. Darah, Odia Odeinun, Femi Osofisan

From the University of Ife:

Biodun Jeyifo, Yemi Ogunbiyi, Kole Omososo, John Obichukwena.

Predictably, the majority of participants came either from the University of Ibadan or the University of Ife, although other major Nigerian universities, Nsukka, Benin-City, Calabar, Zaria, were also represented. In addition, about one hundred delegates including sociologists, critics, journalists, historians, writers, workers and students from all over Africa and the world attended this important literary event.

The first day was devoted to general theories of criticism, the main issue of the discussions being Marxist criticism and its relevance to African literature. The second day dealt with the analysis of works by particular authors. On the third day, the discussions centred on History, Philosophy and the Social Sci-

ences.

In order to grasp the underlying implication of the idea that generated The Ibadan Workshop, it is necessary to gain some insight into the new role which 'the people in academia' are prepared to assume in present-day Nigeria and in Africa in general. What they challenged was the concept of the ivory tower so often associated with academic life. This Workshop gave an opportunity for progressive academics to come together and deliberate on current vital issues of African literature and society. In her statement to the press, Mrs Ogundipe-Leslie, on behalf of 'The Ibadan-life Group', pointed out that 'devotion to meaningful social change should be the measure of our intellectual endeavours . . . Literature, like other forms of art can be an instrument of social change'.

The genesis of this Workshop therefore lies in the awareness that literature being contiguous to politics, the intelligentsia cannot afford to seclude themselves in their 'enviable sanctuary', but on the contrary the universities must be 'the avant-garde of progressive development ideologies'. In this light, The Ibadan Workshop can be seen as a call from progressive Nigerian intellectuals to their indifferent counterparts in Nigeria, Africa, The Third World and elsewhere, to side with the masses in their struggle to achieve genuine and meaningful liberation. Like The Ibadan First Annual Conference of African Literature which was held in July 1976, this Workshop devised a framework for analysing the crucial issues of African literature and society. But its major significance unquestionably lies in the furtherance of the radical options stated by the former Conference, and in its unsurpassed power of articulation.

As evidenced from its very title and from the inspiring and thoughtful inaugural address presented by Professor Ikenna Nzeiruo, the renowned Marxist Sociologist from the University of Nsukka, the initiators of The Ibadan Workshop, all left-wing intellectuals, opted for a markedly Marxist stance. However, they made provisions for the 'pro status quo' camp to be heard as well and this only testifies to their high level of maturity and self-confidence. The usual polarisation between Marxist academics who insist that African literature should perform such functions that are relevant to the African past, present and future, on the one hand, and the liberal humanists who favour less emphasis on commitment in writing, on the other hand, surfaced in the passionate debate that followed the presentation of Dr Omalume Onogor's paper on 'Reflections on Capitalism and the Cultural Question in Africa' and Dr Dan Izeyhaye's on 'Notes on Religion, Myth and Marxism'.

Generally speaking, however, the organizers and the majority of the delegates invariably advocated a historical materialist approach in the appraisal of critical and creative writing in Africa. Their common view clearly vindicated Ezekiel Mphahlele's comment that 'every writer is committed to something beyond his art, to a statement of values not purely aesthetic, to a "criticism of life"'. In other words, since literature is a comment on, and a reflection of, the

general trends of a given society, the act of writing, the products thereof and their critical assessment, must be committed politically and particularly so in the case of an emergent class society like Africa. As Olabiyi O. Yai, one of the participants, aptly put it, 'there is no such thing as an ideologically neutral discipline'. The majority of the delegates therefore unanimously exposed what they termed 'the apoliticism fallacy' as being a pure abstraction. It was pointed out that the advocacy of the 'art-for-art' type of criticism and its pretensions to a mythic universality have for a long time belogged the criticism of African literature which as a consequence has been riddled with problems of self-definition and direction. This situation, together with the ambivalent attitudes of African critics towards Western values only reflected the state of confusion of African society at large.

African writers and critics were therefore urged to put forward an art that will guide Africa towards real emancipation. The call to African writers was particularly apt because of their critical position in society as 'the voice of vision of their time' as Soyinka would put it. And the appeal to African critics was made in view of their central role as 'the aesthetic torch-bearers' who in their mediation between artists and audience, should act the positive values which are the foundation stones of African society.

The proceedings of The Ibadan Workshop are being prepared for publication.

J. N. Dingsome

### Australian Arts and Literature Festival, Aarhus, Denmark, 17-24 April 1978.

The festival of Australian Arts and Literature held at Aarhus in the Spring of 1978 was one of the most comprehensive and wide-ranging exhibitions of Australian culture ever held in Europe. Aarhus had already established for itself an enviable reputation as a centre for Commonwealth studies, as many of the delegates fortunate enough to have attended earlier conferences there already knew. The recent festival, like the many other events concerning the literature and arts of the Commonwealth over the last decade, owed its conception and energetic execution to Anna Rutherford, ably assisted at the time by Kirsten Holst Petersen. Anna Rutherford has put her distinctive stamp of energy,

hospitality and sound judgement on many things connected with Commonwealth studies in the time she has been at Aarhus, but the Australian Arts and Literature Festival was special even by her own high standards.

Delegates, speakers and visitors were greeted with warmth and kindness. The Danish hosts from the Institut for Engelsk Filologi were continually offering kindnesses, large and small, from car rides to meals in their homes. This generosity was matched by the municipality of Aarhus, whose banquet-like 'open table' at the famous Aarhus Town Hall was quite overwhelming. Those who attended felt genuinely grateful to all the organisations, governmental and local, who had supported the occasion.

Perhaps the single most exciting feature of the Festival was its 'openness'. Instead of it being a series of events in some one venue, shut away from the normal public life of the town, it consisted of a wide variety of exhibitions, displays, film programmes and lectures which embraced many of the main permanent cultural institutions in the area including the world-famous museum at Moesgård, the Aarhus Kunstmuseum, the Musikkonservatorium and the Aarhus Hovedbibliotek. Anyone who has helped to organise a large conference with even one or two venues will appreciate the amazing amount of hard work and excellent organisation which this must have entailed. The events happened punctually, and during the week nothing was cancelled or delayed. Indeed, many of the exhibitions, for example the exhibition of Australian Aboriginal Art at Moesgård and that of Sidney Nolan's work at the Aarhus Kunstmuseum, were already open before the Festival.

This fact emphasises another important aspect of the Conference, that it was not designed only to be an internal affair, but looked outwards from the artists and delegates present to the population of Aarhus as a whole. Many people in the area were able, as a result of the Festival, to discover the culture of Australia or to deepen their interests in a wide range of arts by seeing the contribution made in various fields by Australian artists and craftsmen.

In a week that was so packed it is difficult to pick out individual items without prejudice. The choice must be personal. In my own mind the Australian Film Festival stands out clearly as a unique opportunity to compare and contrast a wide range of films made in Australia in the last decade or so. In addition the superb exhibition of early Australian maps, collected and mounted by the Australian writer, Randolph Stow, was a personal highlight. However, in a week which embraced lectures on Australian literature and art, films, music recitals, art exhibitions, exhibitions of books, and demonstrations of crafts the taste and interests of the vast majority of the community were excited and satisfied.

Whenever a large group of people are assembled the possibilities of discord can never be discounted. This is especially so when many of the people are

artists or critics, two groups noted for their disputatiousness and volatile tempers. Anyone who, like myself, has been involved in conferences as participant and organiser for many years is agreeably surprised when such disputes are kept to a minimum, without being replaced by a false bonhomie and a lack of stimulating cut and thrust in debate. The organisers of the Aarhus Festival are to be congratulated for achieving a balance of this kind – a feat I have only known achieved on two previous occasions.

One point of particular value was the varied scale of the events – from large exhibitions to private dinners and parties – which had been organised, making both public debates and private exchanges between individuals possible and effective. Particularly pleasing were the opportunities for meetings and discussions between the delegates and artists and members of the general public. A certain insularity sometimes characterises Australian conferences abroad, but this was not so on this occasion. The writers and artists mingled freely, and a general atmosphere of approachability was felt by all.

Most of the people who attended the conference with whom I have spoken since last year share my memory of it as a well-organised and fruitful work, which they were pleased to have attended. The whole thing must have done a great deal to make Denmark aware of the vigour and range of Australian arts.

GARETH GRIFFITHS

## FESTIVAL PROGRAMME

### Exhibitions:

- Aboriginal Art - Moesgård Museum.

Films on the Australian aborigines were shown in conjunction with this exhibition.

- Sidney Nolan - Aarhus Kunstmuseum  
(Kelly, Diast, Miner and Explorer Series).

Donald Bosen, curator of the Commonwealth Galleries, London, gave a series of illustrated lectures on Australian art in conjunction with this exhibition. The film *Nolan at Sixty* was shown on Danish television in the week prior to the conference.

- The weavings of Florence Higgs.

Several of these weavings, including a quite outstanding work of art entitled

'Bees of the Dreamtime', were based on aboriginal motifs. Florence Higgs was present and gave demonstrations of her craft to weavers who came from all over Jutland.

- Australian Children's Books - Aarhus Hovedbibliotek.

This exhibition was organised by Rosemary Wighton who was present at the Festival and who gave an illustrated lecture on Australian children's literature. The film *Storm Boy*, which had been dubbed into Danish, was shown each day at the library's cinema during the Festival.

- Terra Australis Incognita - City Hall.

This was a map exhibition organised by Randolph Stow. There were eighty-six exhibits starting with 'the Globe of Krates of Mallos, ca. 150 B.C.' in a mediaeval copy and concluding with 'Kart over Australien, 1818. The map complete, after the voyages of Bass, Flinders and Baudin in 1797-1803'. Material for this exhibition was obtained from Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague; The Royal Library, The Hague; The London Library; Marinemuseum 'Prins Hendrik', Rotterdam; National Library of Australia; Universiteitsbibliotheek, Leiden; and the Royal Library, Copenhagen. The four maps from the Royal Library in Copenhagen were alone insured for 1,500,000 kroner (A\$500,000). Also on display at this exhibition were the drawings of Ferdinand Bauer, 'Australian Flowers'. Bauer was the botanist with Flinders on the 1801 expedition. The book has been reprinted by Basilisk Press in a limited number of copies. There is an illustrated catalogue from this exhibition available from Anna Rutherford, price A\$2.

- An exhibition at the State and University Library of books about Australia written by Danes. This exhibition was organised by Vibeke Stenderup, Senior Research Librarian.

- A book exhibition of Australian literature, history and culture at the University Bookshop.

Australian Film Festival.

Aarhus University Film Club in conjunction with the Danish Film Museum. John Heyer was present for the world premiere of his film *The Reef*. During the week of the Festival Danish television showed three Australian films.

Film Programme:

*The Cars that Ate Paris* (Peter Weir)

*Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir)

*The Devil's Playground* (Fred Schepisi)

*The Picture Show Man* (John Power)

*Break of Day* (Ken Hannam)

*Cadette* (Donald Crombie)

*F. J. Halden* (Michael Thornhill)

*The Reef* (John Hoyer)

Piano Recital by Roger Holmes – Det jyske Musikonservatorium

Apart from J. S. Bach, Robert Schumann and Olivier Messiaen, Roger Holmes included the work of the Australian composers Barry McKimm and Robert Rooney.

Poetry readings by Les Murray, Mark O'Connor and Peter Porter.

#### SEMINAR PROGRAMME

Opening address: Professor Donald Hannah, Aarhus University.

Lloyd Robson, 'G. M. H. Clark's History: Structure and Assumptions'.

Rosemary Wigham, 'Australian Children's Literature'.

Randolph Stow, 'Denmark in the Indian Ocean, 1616-1845: an introduction'.

Les A. Murray, 'Bocotian and Athenian Art in Australia'.

Mark O'Connor, 'The "renaissance" in Australian poetry'.

Stephen Murray-Smith, 'Overland and the New Nationalism'.

Kristin Williamson, 'The History of Australian Women – a colonized sex'.

Bruce Charles Ross, 'The International Element in Recent Australian Short Fiction'.

Hans Hauge, 'Something Wrong in the state of fiction? Michael Wilding's *Short Story Embassy*'.

David Williamson, 'Recent Australian Drama'.

Gareth Griffiths, 'Experimental Form in Some Recent Australian Dramas'.

#### Report from the FILLM Conference: Aix-en-Provence, 28 August - 2 September 1978

The theme for the 14th conference of the *Fédération Internationale de Langues et Littératures Modernes*, of which ACLALS is now a member, was *Society and Self in Language and Literature*. There were more than four hundred delegates from about forty countries, and nine sections offered papers at the same time



There were so many last minute cancellations that the printed programme became more or less useless, and the organisation was so chaotic that sometimes chairmen did not turn up for their sessions or papers were read at times different from the ones announced only a couple of hours before. The number of papers on Commonwealth topics, most of which were unimpressive, was halved by the absence of expected speakers, especially from Africa and India.

In my opinion the best performances in our field were by Patrick Holland (Concordia) and John B. Beston (Kuwait). Holland based his paper on Shad-bolt's *Tusk of Clay* and Laurence's *The Dharma*, two novels with artists, creators of myths by which others live, as heroes. Internationally novels like these, like so much of Commonwealth literature, may be second class, but they have a very important national role to fulfil. Holland came to the defence of stereotype and cliché since these allow identification with something like archetypes. They help build up a collective consciousness, which is important in these insecure ex-colonial societies where a recognition of themselves is so often missing. Beston, relying for the force of his argument on the transparent presentation of the material, gave a picture of Witi Ihimaera in changing New Zealand society. He opposed his sense of tribal identity and the values of mutual support and compassion shown in his novels to Pakeha society, whose basic lovelessness Beston emphasized again. In his latest publication, the volume of short stories *The New Net Goes Fishing*, Ihimaera not only leaves the rural society of his previous books, but becomes more radical.

Patricia Morley (Concordia) had another look at the influence of Puritanism on Canadian literature. In contrast to Brown she does not think of it as pernicious but as beneficial. She attributes to it the idea of divine immanence in the natural world, the sense of value and dignity of the individual and the importance of community, of which so much Canadian fiction speaks. Lorraine McMullen (Ottawa) commented on women in Canadian novels from *Wild Geese* to *The Dharma* and noted that a large number of female heroes are clearly androgynous.

Willfried Feuser (Port Harcourt) gave plot outlines of African fiction (both Anglophone and Francophone) with heroes rebelling for or against tradition. Edward P. Vargo (Fu-Jen) spoke about freedom and creativity in China and West Africa. He believes that writers working in a world dominated by totalitarian ideologies can contribute to humanizing them. Censorship was mentioned, and Vargo concluded that West African writers are still freer than their Chinese counterparts both on the mainland and in Taiwan.

The paper of K.S. Narayana Rao (Wisconsin) was entitled 'The New Harvest: Indian Writing in English, National or International?'. Once again the writer's problem raised by the need to reflect a universal outlook while remaining close to the Indian background was examined. He only dealt with Rao, Anand, Narayan and Markandeya, but isn't it time that younger writers like

Anita Desai and Arun Joshi are taken notice of? – An interesting philosophical exploration of the idea of the self and the non-self and the correlated concepts of reality and unreality underlying Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* came from R. Ramaswamy (Bangalore).

The following is a list of other papers on Commonwealth literature read at the conference: A. Brandon Conron (Western Ontario), 'A Canadian Novelist, Morley Callaghan and his Audience'; Alan L. McLeod (Rider College), 'Black Writer and White Reader: Adaptation in the Works of Claude McKay'; Theo Vincent (Lagos), 'The Writer in a Changing Society, The Case of African Literature'.

There was a large contingent of Australian delegates, but no paper on Australian literature was read. Several speakers addressed themselves to Francophone African and Canadian writing. Two papers not dealing directly with Commonwealth literature deserve to be mentioned. A fine paper on two Bengali novels was read by Meenakshi Mukherjee (Lady Shri Ram College). Critics expecting to find novels leading to a climax along the fundamental axes of time and place had attacked them for being formless. Mukherjee showed how they are structured on patterns of recurring symbols and metaphors, on the reiteration of themes, and on the cycle of the seasons. What matters in these novels is not action, but continuity. The other was by Johan Smorenburg (Beaumont) who spoke about the much neglected Dutch writing coming from the West Indies.

KLAUS STUCKERT

CACLALS conference: 'The Commonwealth in Canada' – Concordia University, Montreal, 18-22 October 1978.

The first North American conference devoted entirely to Commonwealth literature was a highly successful event. It followed the now familiar pattern of Commonwealth conferences with contributions from scholars in the form of traditional academic papers, alternating with writers reading from their works and talking on the basis of their own experiences as creative artists. This was supplemented by a number of related activities such as film screenings and live theatre performances.

In the first of the academic papers G. D. Killam presented 'A Canadian View of the Commonwealth', in which he examined the implications of the three terms we use to define our discipline: 'Commonwealth', 'literary', and 'studies'.

Mulk Raj Anand was the first of the writers to speak. In his paper on 'Pigeon-Indian' he gave the delegates an interesting insight into some of the problems and rewards that are involved in working with the linguistic resources of his specific cultural milieu.

The third day of the conference opened with what I personally look back upon as the highlight of the entire event. Through a mixture of readings and cultural and historical background information, Witi Ihimaera gave a paper entitled 'Into the World of Light: The Maori Literary Tradition'. Together with Australia's Kath Walker, who read from her own poetry in the afternoon and introduced the documentary film *Shades Sister*, he made a valuable contribution to our appreciation of the beauty and vitality of the minority cultures of the Commonwealth.

Playwright Ron Blair presented a historical survey of drama in Australia, 'An Australian Theatre: At Last'. This talk was followed by a performance of his own play *The Christian Brothers*, which got a very enthusiastic reception.

Kenneth Ramchand gave a paper on some of the problems facing the Commonwealth critic. The title of the paper was 'Critical Perspectives in West Indian Literature', but the implications were much wider. Taking the introduction to *Contexts of Canadian Criticism* as his starting point (in a way that Eli Mandel might have found somewhat puzzling had he been present himself), Dr Ramchand insisted upon the importance of an approach that relies on the literary text itself rather than seeing it in its cultural or social context. This paper triggered off one of the most heated discussions at the conference.

The last day of the conference opened with a talk by Michael Anthony on 'Aspects of Caribbean Writing'.

Sectional seminars were conducted on two afternoons, with four sessions, each consisting of three papers, running concurrently. There were papers focussing on individual writers and on the various national traditions. There were seminars on special topics, including women writers, colonialism and politics, pastoral, anti-pastoral and *Bildungsroman*. Problems of language, culture and critical approach were also dealt with.

Where C. D. Killam's paper had looked at the Commonwealth from a Canadian viewpoint, R. T. Robertson closed the conference with a paper on 'The Commonwealth View of Canada', in which he drew together some of the themes of the four days by placing them in a historical perspective.

'The Commonwealth in Canada' was realized through the efforts of a planning committee chaired by Patrick Holland.

FLEMMING BRAHMS

SAES Conference, Strasbourg, 5-7 May 1979.

The Commonwealth Section of the SAES was one of the most lively and well attended sections of the conference. A wide variety of papers were offered as the following list will show, and at one point it was necessary to split the Commonwealth group into two sections so that all the papers offered could be given.

Papers included Marcienne Rocard, 'Margaret Laurence's Attempt at Audio-Visual Fiction'; Carol Durix, 'Maori Art'; Jacques Leclair, 'Achebe'; J. Alvarez Pereyre, 'The South African writer, Con Mattera'; René Richard, 'The Lion and the Jewel'; M. Polet, 'Mr Gokal'; Kirsten Holst Petersen, 'Mau-Mau: fact and fiction'; Jacqueline Bardolph, 'Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Golding's *Lord of the Flies*'; A. Demmergues, 'A Fringe of Leaves'. Marcienne Rocard's paper is published in this issue of *Kusapipi*. Other papers will be published in the journal of the association, *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*.

It was decided that for the next conference to be held in Poitiers there should be specialized texts. The texts chosen were Patrick White, *A Fringe of Leaves*; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Peaks of Blood*; and Edward Braithwaite, *Rites of Passage*. If any persons are interested in offering papers on these works they should contact Mme Nodeljkovic, Caen University (White); Mme Jacqueline Bardolph, Nice University (Ngugi wa Thiong'o); Mme Maas-Jelinek, Liège University (Braithwaite); or the co-ordinator of the Commonwealth section, Anna Rutherford, Aarhus University, Denmark.

### Third International Janheinz-Jahn Symposium, Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, 11-13 May 1979.

The conference commenced with the awarding of an honorary doctorate to Ulli Beier. Following the ceremony Ulli Beier gave the first paper on 'Politics and Literature in Nigeria: the example of Duro Ladipo'.

The next paper was given by Hans-Albert Walter of the University of Hamburg. The theme of the conference was 'Opposition and Exile' and here Walter chose to speak about the German writers exiled during the Nazi period in Germany, suggesting that parallels could be drawn between their plight and that of the African writers in exile. This was a very controversial paper and created a fierce emotional response on the part of many of the audience.

A memorable event was Camara Laye's talk about his life in Paris as a poor student and how he came to write *The African Child*.

We have come to expect something exciting and interesting from Taban Lo Liyong, and he didn't disappoint us. His paper was on 'Politics and Literature

in Uganda'; he spoke about the 'big jaws' and the 'little jaws' and showed how the traditional elements in the society were not conducive to the overthrow of the ruling group. It was both informative and entertaining and, in my opinion, one of the highlights of the conference.

Other papers given were: Hans Zell (England), 'The African Writer and His Publisher'; Dieter Riemenschneider (German Federal Republic), 'The Biafra War in Nigerian Literature'; Donald Burness (USA), 'Literary Opposition in Angola, Moçambique, Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe in Colonial Time'; Lewis Nkosi, 'South African Writers in Exile'; René Philombe (Cameroon), 'La littérature contemporaine au Caméroun'; Daniel Racine (Gouadeloupe/USA), 'The Theme of Exile in the Negritude Literature'; and János Riess (German Federal Republic), 'The Image of Home in Francophone Literature'.

The organisers Ulla Schild and Gerhard Grohs are to be congratulated on organising what all the delegates agreed was an exceedingly rewarding and stimulating conference.

ANNA RUTHERFORD

## Australian Literature Symposium, University of Augsburg, 19-22 June 1979.

For Australian delegates, like myself, only half-aware of the extent to which Australian Studies have infiltrated the curricula of European Universities, the June conference in Augsburg on *Australian Literature in the Twentieth Century* came as an experience of delight and astonishment.

Only two conferences of this kind have been held in Australia itself, and even the first of those post-dated the European conferences at Venice, Besançon, Toulouse and Aarhus.

First impressions of Augsburg were, thus, of unimagined luxury, not only in the actual physical comfort of the Aede Haus St Ulrich and the warmth of the welcome offered by Professor Schäfer and his helpers, but in the variety and scope of the papers to be offered and the presence, contributions and readings of a distinguished trio of younger writers – David Malouf, Les Murray and Tom Shapecott.

It was, of course, a pity that the date coincided with a busy week of examining for colleagues in Britain and France. It was perhaps a pity, too, that all the papers were given by Anglophone scholars (if Dr Porteous will forgive me

classing him with the Sassanachs for want of a better terminology) but this was amply made up for by the introductory comments of the chairmen, Professors Drescher, Priessnitz, Goetsch and Malnusch and by the lively discussion that followed even the more specialized papers.

The careful thought that had gone into the selection of the papers gathered to itself the serendipity that good planning always attracts. Alexander Porteous's paper on Patrick White introduced the sessions. His argument was concerned to make distinctions between the more and less successful novels and dealt mainly with *The Eye of the Storm*. Although the critical judgments met with some stimulating disagreement, the paper provided a splendid theoretical discussion of the integration of symbolism into the fictive characterisation and social texture of the Novel in general and inspired much of the following debate.

Anna Rutherford's paper entitled 'A Terrible Faith: Irish Catholicism in Australia' took as its text Ron Blair's brilliant play *The Christian Brothers*, but it became an extended and outspoken introduction to a subject that has essential bearing on the way Australians perceive their own society and on the liberation of thought associated with the second Vatican Council that has brought about both an immense creative flowering and a tragic disillusion. There is no doubt that the busting-out of young Catholic and lapsed-Catholic writers in Australia offers fascinating challenges to critics and literary sociologists and Professor Rutherford made a fine preliminary skirmish into the territory. Her picture of the pluralist nature of Australian society also helped to dispel the self-congratulatory air of national consensus that tends to hover over Australian literary discussions.

Peter Holloway's paper evaluating the flourishing new modes of Australian theatre and the critical responses that have so far been made to them, then, by a happy coincidence, consolidated the discussion of the Blair play with an informative survey and some most helpful bibliographical material. Like much current theatre elsewhere, Australian drama tends to be at its most vital in improvisations, virtuoso performances and unconsolidated texts. The printed versions of plays do not always reflect their significance for audiences as they were first performed. Plays, moreover, suffer more than novels from the endemic inefficiency of overseas distribution channels for books published in Australia (as most plays are) and this informative survey was thus for many people an introduction to otherwise unavailable material.

In a paper on modern short fiction, Elizabeth Wehby attacked the question of how far the commonly practised modes can be held to constitute a tradition; whether, indeed, there is a tradition of short fiction deriving from Henry Lawson and how far modern kinds can be seen as a development of it or a reaction from it. Carole Ferrier, in a discussion of the later novels of K. S. Prichard raised interesting questions of the effect of doctrinaire political commitment on the imaginative portrayal of event, character and background in social realist

fiction.

Three major poets, Rosemary Dohson, Gwen Harwood and Judith Wright, were introduced in splendid exegetical readings by Jenny Strauss. Her plea was for a true discrimination of the qualities that may be held to distinguish women poets, while at the same time questioning the value of making such a distinction at all. Mark Macleod then wound up the paper-giving by leading us into questions of imaginative contact between the black and white races in Australia through the work of Patricia Wigham and her extensions of Aboriginal legends.

The papers were arranged to cover not only a wide range of subject matter but a variety of critical approaches. Nevertheless there was a sense of common pursuits and interests not always to be found at international meetings and it was of interest to me, though I don't know how to interpret it, that Freudian, Marxist and Structuralist approaches were virtually absent both from the papers and from the discussion.

The political and wider academic implications of such a successful conference were obvious to all the participants. Australia is only just beginning to discover the shop-window value of her literature but on this occasion Mr Max Loveday, the Australian Ambassador, as well as being responsible for a large part of the funding, offered a reception (South Australian wines included) and Dr Thompson, an Embassy official and herself a literary scholar was able to stay to the end, attending all the later sessions. The appeals by Professors Schäfer and Priessnitz at the final session for vigorous action in helping the development in Germany of specialist Australian areas of study within the general field of New Literatures in English did not fall on deaf ears. Much has already been achieved. The University of Göttingen's acquisition of 15,000 volumes of Australiana – the collection of Professor Colin Roderick – will help to create a major research centre in Europe and specialist collections are also becoming sizeable at Wuppertal and elsewhere. The questions of exchanges of students, especially at Masters level and of guest lecturers and professors will surely be taken up with enthusiasm.

Perhaps the true value of conferences is in the personal contacts and the extra-curricular talk that transforms a Herr Professor into a Bill or a Volker to whom one can afterwards write without restraint about a problem or about a graduate student. None who was at Augsburg will forget the evening talks – or the delightful excursion through Bavaria which finally proved that even the weather had been responding exactly as planned to the controlling genius of Professor Schäfer and his organizing team.

DAVID BRADLEY

# ACLALS

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## FIJI CONFERENCE

All members should have received registration forms for the Fifth Triennial ACLALS conference to be held at the University of the South Pacific, 3-8 January 1980. If anyone has not received a form, would they please contact Anna Rutherford, Department of English, University of Aarhus, Denmark.

## SIXTH TRIENNIAL CONFERENCE, 1983

Questions have been raised about the venue and date for this conference.

*Place.* Originally Vancouver was suggested as the site. Guilph has now also been proposed.

*Time.* Would August 1983 be a suitable time? ACLALS conferences have been held in January since 1971, but January is a cold month in Canada. Late August rather than early has been suggested.

Decisions about both these points will be made at the executive meeting in Fiji, so if you feel strongly about it would you please tell me so I can present your point of view at the meeting.

Ken Goodwin reports that a West Indies branch of ACLALS has been formed and they were to have their first conference in September.

The Indian association has announced plans to hold a conference. A report on both conferences will appear in the next issue of *Kusapipi*.

## EACLALS

## VISITING WRITER

Six persons have contacted me to tell me that they would like Margaret Atwood to visit their institution. I am still waiting for a firm reply from Ms Atwood confirming that she is willing to accept the Fellowship. Those who have expressed interest in her visiting them will be kept informed.



## FACILALS CONFERENCE, 1981

Dieter Riemenschneider has informed me that Frankfurt will host this conference but has not yet supplied me with dates or theme.

## SHORT STORY COMPETITION

The short story competition has been won by the Australian writer Mark O'Connor with his entry 'The Black Cabaret'. Mark O'Connor has won a number of major international awards for his poetry, but this is his first award for prose fiction. The winning story plus two others entered in the competition are published in this issue of *Kunapipi*. The response to the competition was very pleasing with over sixty entries. The largest number came from Australia, New Zealand, India and Sri Lanka but most countries were represented. Several other entries will be published in the next issue of *Kunapipi*.

## COMMONWEALTH POETRY PRIZE

The annual award of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize has been shared this year between the New Zealand poet Brian Turner for his book *Ladders of Rain* and the Nigerian writer Gabriel Okara for *The Fisherman's Innocation*. A review of these two books appears in this issue.

The Commonwealth Poetry Prize of £500 is awarded annually for a first book of poetry in English published by an author from a Commonwealth country other than Britain. Manuscripts and typescripts cannot be accepted. Information can be obtained from Michael Foster, Commonwealth Institute, Kensington High Street, London W8 6NQ, England.

## RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

A group of Danish researchers has begun work on a complete bibliography of Samoa (Western Samoa as well as American Samoa). The group consists of Hans Gullestrup, Aalborg University; Jan Hjarnø, Director, Odder Museum; Inger Høyedahl Jensen, lecturer, Danish School of Librarianship; Vibeke Stenderup, Research librarian, State and University Library, Aarhus. For further information write to Vibeke Stenderup.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

*Elaine Campbell* teaches at Brandeis University, USA; *Phyllis Shand Alfrey* is a writer, editor of *The Star* newspaper and former federal minister in the West Indian Federation; *Sabramani* is a creative writer who teaches at the University of the South Pacific, Fiji; *Jørgen Riber Christensen* is a graduate of the University of Aarhus; *Punyakante Wijesatke*, Sri Lankan writer; *Angus Calder* teaches at the Open University; *Meja Mwangi* is a Kenyan novelist; *Bernik Lindfors* is editor of *Research in African Literature*; *Kofi Awoonor*, Ghanaian writer; *Jan Munro* teaches at Wahan University, China; *Søren Poulsen*, Danish author; *Mike Jenkins*, Welsh poet; *Marianne Racard* teaches at the University of Toulouse–Le Mirail; *Mark O'Connor*, Australian writer; *David Williamson*, Australian dramatist; *Bruce Claxton Ross*, Australian who teaches at the University of Copenhagen; *Les Murray*, Australian poet; *Kirsten Holst Petersen* teaches at the University of Aarhus; *Donald Hamish* teaches at the University of Aarhus; *Klaus Stärker* teaches at Kantonsschule Zürcher Oberland; *Jørn Carlsen* teaches at the University of Aarhus; *Nelson Wattie*, New Zealander who teaches at Fachhochschule Köln; *Anneliese Backmann* teaches at Handelshøjskolen, Aarhus; *Aune Rutherford* teaches at the University of Aarhus; *James Wisland* teaches at the University of Wollongong, Australia; *Jeanne Dingoni* is a Cameroonian who teaches at Ibadan Polytechnic, Nigeria; *Gareth Griffiths* teaches at Macquarie University, Australia; *Flemming Bødvar*, a graduate of Aarhus University, teaches at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada; *David Bradley* teaches at Monash University, Australia.

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### **ENIGMA OF VALUES: an introduction**

*Edited by Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford*

ENIGMA OF VALUES: an introduction contains a chapter describing the critical approach to literature of the West Indian writer and critic Wilson Harris. When he was guest lecturer in Commonwealth Literature at Aarhus University, Denmark in 1973 Wilson Harris developed his ideas on the novel as an open form susceptible of renewal and traced attempts to break through the accepted conventions of fiction in works written in the last century or so. The other essays in this book offer interpretations of well-known novels, which take into account Wilson Harris's critical ideas.

*'Enigma of Values is a welcome addition to those works of criticism that help us to widen and complicate the map of our sensibility.'* Michael Gilkes in *Research in African Literature*.

Danish kroner 40.

### **THE NAKED DESIGN**

*Hena Maes-Jelinek*

This study by one of the major critics of Wilson Harris's work gives the first detailed analysis of the way in which language and imagery function in *Palace of the Peacock* to create a new art of fiction.

Danish kroner 20.

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